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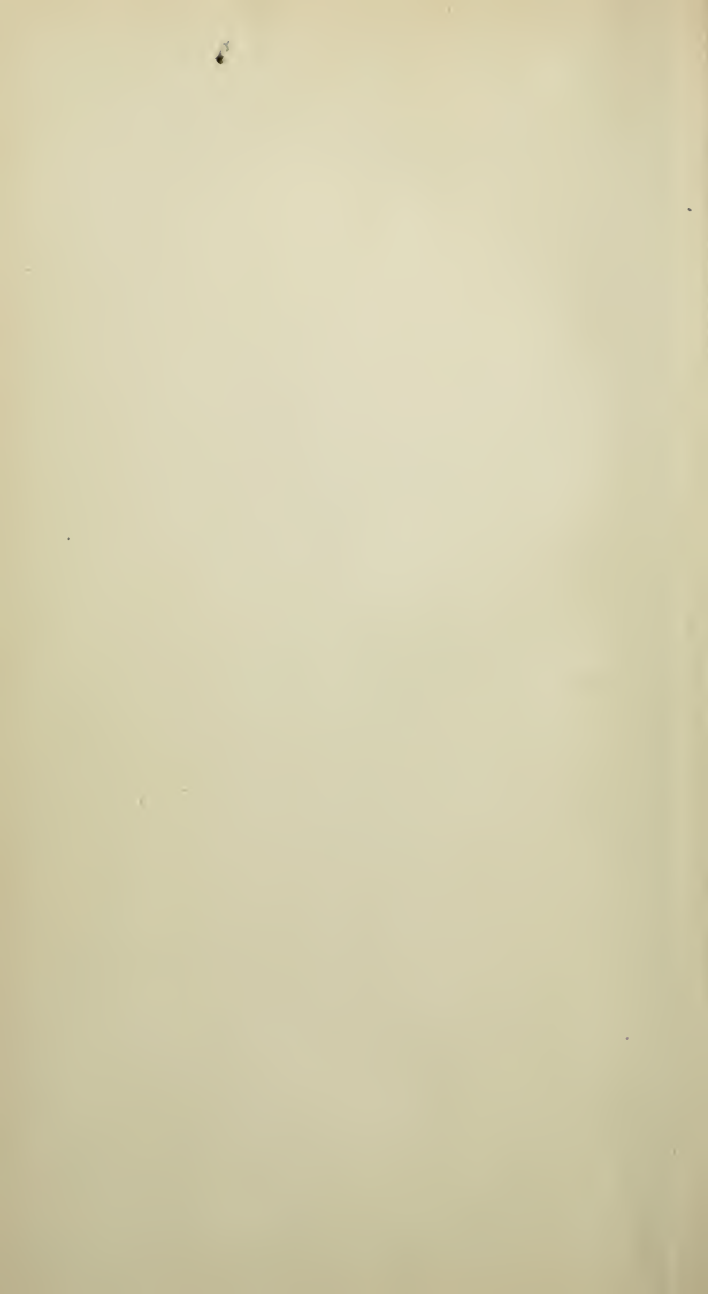


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# PREACHING AND HEARING.





AIDS

TO

PREACHING AND HEARING.

BY

THOMAS H. SKINNER.

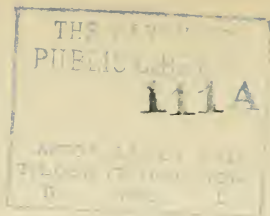
"I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE."

"FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD."

NEW-YORK:

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## P R E F A C E.

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THIS work is not a regular treatise, but a collection of pieces relating to the same subject, and connected only by that general relation. Order has not been wholly disregarded in their collocation, but there is no necessity that they should be perused consecutively : any one of them may be read without disadvantage from unacquaintance with the others.

The topics I have selected are those which I thought most important to my object ; which was, to promote improvement in preaching and hearing the gospel, by cherishing a just and enlightened sense in the community, of the incomparable dignity and excellency of the preacher's work.

These pages are designed not for preachers only, but for the public. Improvement in the faculty of

hearing, would follow, I know, as a natural consequence from improvement in the correlative faculty of preaching; but the surest way to secure the latter end, is to diffuse among the people just sentiments concerning the appropriate character and spirit of the pulpit; and to do this, as far as I was able, was my chief motive in the composition of this volume. I discourse, it is true, on subjects connected directly with the function of a particular order; but the highest interests of all men are involved in that function, and I have framed my discourse so as to suit it as completely as I could to the popular understanding. Some of the topics are of such a nature as to require the reader's patient application, but the discussions of them here submitted to the public will be found, it is presumed, sufficiently plain to be within the comprehension of any one who will give them his attention.

In various ways I hope this book will further the ends at which it aims. It is certainly a powerful aid to preachers to be under the impression, while performing their work, that their hearers are well-informed on such subjects as are here discussed;

and proficiency in preaching tends to proficiency in hearing ; but this latter will be promoted in a direct manner, also, by acquaintance, on the part of hearers, with these subjects.

The longest of these discussions—that on ability—I have not excluded, notwithstanding its controversial aspect, because, while I am of opinion that clearness of views on the subject of it is essential to clear and consistent preaching, I am not without the hope that those who will read this piece to the end, will think that I have herein ministered not to discord, but harmony among brethren, both by the doctrine I have advanced and the manner in which I have maintained it.

The influence of the poet Coleridge on the theology and the pulpit of this country, I have supposed to be undesirable. So far as it has extended, it appears to have been unhappy. It is not surprising that such writings as his should have great power on minds of certain classes. There is a force of genius in them, of which readers of kindred genius cannot but be deeply and delightfully conscious ; and

there are others, whom weakness and vanity lead to a servile devotion to them. Further ; amidst transcendental emanations, in which he seems to lose himself, at least in which he cannot be followed, there are corruscations of light, exhibitions of intellectual penetration and strength, nicely discriminated, just, and most forcible statements of truth, which must command every intelligent and candid reader's admiration : but there are two points especially—two fundamental ones—wherein his poetico-philosophical works have, I think, seriously assailed the Christian system ; one, the piacular or atoning influence of the death of Christ, which in *the strict sense* he explicitly disowns ;\* the other, the doctrine of grace, which, as the reader will see, I have understood him so to inculcate as to confound Divine and Human agency, and to supersede grace in the appropriate sense of the term.

It may disappoint some, that the aid which I here proffer is not more direct. My book, perhaps, would be more welcome to these persons if it were a mass

\* See note, page 303.



of skeletons, or abstracts of sermons, such as have been so greatly multiplied and so freely circulated of late. I have no confidence in the utility of these productions. The laws of the human mind must be changed before solid improvement, in either preaching or hearing, can be advanced by such means. The churches and their pastors should, I think, conspire to banish them, as hostile, directly and indirectly, to the success of the gospel.



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# AIDS TO PREACHING.

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## I.

### MENTAL DISCIPLINE.

STUDIOUS and pious habits have, by some persons, been thought unfriendly to each other; hence there have been men of piety who renounced learning, as well as men of learning who neglected piety; and thus have arisen two of the most fruitful sources of evil to mankind,—I know not which is worse,—ignorant religion, and irreligious knowledge.

As in other cases, mutual repugnance here, has sprung, at least to some extent, from mutual misunderstanding. Pious men have sometimes identified learning with what the Scriptures have reprobated under the name of the wisdom of this world; and men devoted to learning have sometimes strangely miscon-

ceived of religion, as almost the same thing with contempt of intellectual excellence.

The former mistake,—I omit now the consideration of the latter,—is not difficult to be explained. Learning, as generally cultivated and used, and as treasured in books, bears the image and superscription of the unsanctified world, and indeed is that world's chief stronghold and champion: Such learning is destined to come to nought. Except to resist and countervail its tendencies, the simple spirit of piety can choose to have but little to do with it: And on the supposition that all learning must be such,—a mistake which it is not surprising some pious men have fallen into,—entire non-intercourse with learning, except if possible to abolish it, would not be undesirable or unwise. But learning need not bear the world's stamp, or be pervaded with the world's spirit. Piety may dwell with it, may enjoy and use it, as lawfully as wealth, or honor, or any of the good things of this life. Indeed, piety and learning have a peculiar affinity for each other; the association of them is natural, and ought, if possible, to be inviolable. All their elements and tendencies



harmonize perfectly ; and, if combined, would increase each other's efficiency : Piety would exalt and illuminate learning, and learning would contribute to the dignity, the strength and the enlargement of piety : They ought always, therefore, as far as possible, to dwell and live, with and in each other ; each loving and cherishing the other as itself.

II. The church, on this point, has been under no mistake. The outcry against learning, which, in almost every age, has to some extent been raised within her borders, was not her own voice, but that of frenzied fanatics, or unlettered bigots, in membership indeed, but, in this respect, not in fellow-feeling with her. What friend has learning ever had, as constant, as faithful, as munificent, as efficient, as the church ? What testimony has she given in behalf of learning by her standing demand for it in the ministry ? Her first ministers, heaven-taught, had the various languages of men as perfectly at their command as their own vernacular tongue ; and what in them was the product of miracle, she has required to be as perfectly as possible supplied in their successors by thorough education.

The church has encouraged learning in all her members; has expended treasure and life in maintaining it both within and without her pale; and has at this moment thousands of devoted, enterprizing, and indefatigable laborers, night and day, employed in its service.

III. The days of miraculous illumination being past, those who deem themselves called of God to the work of the ministry, should conclude that they are also *called of God* to the most sedulous cultivation and discipline of their mental powers,—the only way to learning and the just use of learning, when miracles are no more. However strong and ardent may be their desire to engage at once in the business of saving men, and whatever temptations, labors, expenses, difficulties, may be incidental to a complete course of preparatory discipline, they should not enter the sacred office until they shall have finished such a course; and all their lifetime, they should continue the processes of mental culture and improvement, separating themselves from all secular pursuits, abjuring every form of self-indulgence, observing fixed and severe rules of study, seeking and intermeddling

with all wisdom, and going, from day to day, and year to year, the same unvaried round of intellectual application.

Assuming, then, that those who are, or are preparing to be, employed in the work of the ministry, are, by every means in their power, and for the highest and most sacred of all purposes, pursuing that intellectual improvement and furniture, without which they cannot meet the just demands of their function, I shall endeavor in the following remarks to explain some of the most important of the principles which should govern them in prosecuting that pursuit.

IV. The highest wisdom in conducting this business, as well as every other in which our faculties can be employed, is, without question, subjecting them absolutely to the command of a holy Will—making every intellectual exertion, an instance of a strictly spiritual and religious manner of life. He who in a course of study maintains the closest walk with God, takes the best way to make study available to its immediate purposes. He is more likely to excel in mental improvement, in strength and vigor of understanding, in

ability to think, investigate and instruct, in learning and all intellectual treasures and resources, than if he should allow the desire of intellectual preëminence, or the love of learning, to domineer within him, altogether unregulated, unrestrained, unmeddled with, by any religious principle or feeling. Will it be questioned, that nothing is so well suited to draw out all the powers of the mind into their most perfect operation, as to bring it into intercourse with Him who is the source and centre of all minds? His presence alone, felt and enjoyed, will more quicken illuminate and enlarge the mind of man, than all other influences beside. It rouses and stimulates all that is spiritual or intellectual within us, to be consciously in the presence of a man of great intellectual excellence: Must not he then who, by the sense-surmounting power of faith, dwells in the secret place of the Most High, have of all men, other things being equal, incomparably the purest, richest, mightiest mental life? A consciousness of the *presence* of the Supreme Mind—what intellectual alertness, what stirring of the mental fires, what proclivity to thought, what

capacity of great and just conceptions, what security against partial, low, uncomprehensive views, must not that feeling imply.

V. It will not be questioned that it is practicable to have such access of mind to the mind of the Infinite Spirit. What else is living piety? Piety is but a name, if it be not the mingling of man's mind and spirit with the mind and spirit of his omnipresent Maker.

Nor do I suppose that any one doubts the practicability of maintaining a constant and ever-deepening sense of the presence and fellowship of God, in a course of severe study. It is, indeed, impossible to be *directly* communing with God, while giving the mind wholly to study. The human mind can give itself directly to but one thing at once: This, however, is true in respect to all other as well as intellectual occupations. But it is possible to conduct other pursuits with various degrees of spiritual feeling. They may be conducted by men presumed, on the whole, to be pious, with almost no recognition during the day of the Divine Providence or Existence; or, notwithstanding the law of finite mind, which forbids its attending perfectly to



more than one thing at once, they may be engaged in with a heart so filled with the Spirit of God, as to have every instant a heavenward aspiration, and to be, in a manner, in a perpetual intercourse with heaven; insomuch that it may be said with strict truth, that every thing is done, even eating and drinking, to the glory of God, and in the name of Christ. Thus may men practise agriculture, or any manual occupation; and why may not the deepest and intensest studies be prosecuted in the same manner? Why may we not be exploring the causes and relations of things, conversing with truth in its purest and brightest forms, enriching our hearts and understandings with the choicest treasures of wisdom and learning, and be doing this in the very frame of spirit, in which we should wish to die, or to stand before the last judgment seat—doing it in the fear of God, and with instant prayer for his blessing and assistance?—It is a strange, however frequent mistake, to think that there is any incongruity between the severest mental application, and the highest degrees of spiritual mindedness. There is, indeed, dan-



ger that high intellectual pursuits, uncontrolled by pious feelings, may lead to every species of irreligious indifference and misbelief; but there is no necessity that such pursuits should be so uncontrolled. There are no pursuits in which men can engage, more congenial with the spirit of piety. Thinking, studying, reflecting,—what so directly tends to intercommunion between the mind, and its infinite Author? Plainly, there ought to be no studying, no thinking, unassociated with thoughts of God, and acknowledged dependence on him. It has been with perfect justice observed, that the thought of God, to a serious mind, might be expected to come second to almost every thought. It is, indeed, wonderful that the contrary sentiment should have ever been avowed. That those who have the charge of business, of government, of domestic affairs, should be supposed to have temptations to unspiritual habits, is not surprising; but that men devoted to the search of truth as their only calling, and, above all, that theological students should complain of such temptations, is as if a man should undertake to excuse his neglect of a

duty, by pleading the multitude of the inducements and facilities which he had for performing it. From no members of the church should as high measures of personal holiness be expected, as from her ministers, and those who are preparing for the ministry. No places under heaven should be more distinguished for spiritual living; than the seats of our theological schools.

We may sink very low in pious feeling while pursuing our studies; we may become remiss in devout meditation, and in private prayer; we may indulge worldly feeling, and fix our heart on the honor which cometh from man; we may be inflated with ambition, and dwell in spiritual darkness, and have almost no symptom of the Divine life left within us. Or, on the other hand, we may rise to an unusual height of sympathy and intercourse with heaven; may make our studies a link for communion with the spirits of the blessed in their rapt meditations; may read, and write, and reflect, and take our recreations, and return to our books,—and be doing all to the glory of God, and under the light of his countenance. I will not mention all the

reasons why the latter course should be chosen; but merely repeat, by way of recommending it, that it is at the same time the road to the highest possible success in study, and that which, of all other courses, best agrees with the just tendencies and demands of a studious life.

VI. It may now be thought, perhaps, that enough has been said to our purpose;—that if regard be not paid to the counsel which has been given, little may be expected from the prescription, or the observance of any other counsel; and that if the course recommended be followed, no further directions will be necessary. However just the former conclusion may be, the latter can by no means be admitted. A mind unsullied by evil might still need instruction, in order to be able to see every path of wisdom and truth it should pursue: much more then, any human mind, at best pure but in part, however elevated and fixed in holy feeling and resolution. Could we rise at once above every disadvantage of our present imperfect state; could we from this moment transcend in purity of heart, the greatest of saints, we would have the do-

cility of a little child, and be conscious, also, of more than a little child's necessities and dependence. Holiness, in the highest degree in which it is ever possessed on earth, does not supersede instruction as to what is wise and prudent in particular practice; it only gives aptitude to seek for and appreciate and follow good instruction. Hence while study should be begun and prosecuted in intercourse with God, he does not truly maintain that intercourse, but is an instance of deplorable self-conceit, who, on account of fancied illumination from heaven, thinks himself above the need of all teaching as to the particular principles and rules best to be observed in pursuing a course of study.

VII. As Hope is the spring of endeavor, a student should keep himself, amidst all his intellectual toils, under the impression of the most animating fact, that the human mind, in every power, is illimitably improveable. To the loftiest height of intelligence ever attained by man, the ascent was from an embryo state of intellectual life. Nor was that ascent the bare result of necessity, or of any thing in the nature of mind, or of peculiarity

in the structure of a particular mind. It can now be hardly questioned that the best human mind, if shut out perfectly from all external influences, would be, at even the remotest period of its existence, scarcely cognizable as a mind: Nor would it be in a less undesirable condition, though not so immured, provided all fit care and culture should be withheld from it. The life of the mind, like that of the body, depends for its growth, on its receiving appropriate nourishment and attention. It must at first be duly cared for and fostered by others; afterwards by both others and itself; and then, by itself at least perpetually, in order to reach and retain its just stature and strength. It needs culture; but there is the highest encouragement to bestow culture upon it, in its wonderful improveability. There is almost no point of improvement, which any sound human mind should despair to reach. The original peculiarities of different minds are undoubtedly great, and they are, usually, proportionably great in development, if not suppressed through neglect or unhappy discipline; but I hazard the assertion that the



intellectual elevation to which the generality of distinguished men have attained, is below that which might be attained by almost any person of good natural parts, provided health and life should not prematurely fail, and if from the early buddings of intellect, suitable methods of application and training should be employed, with due diligence and perseverance. Without, however, going to what any one will think an extreme on this subject, it may be confidently said, that one who has given himself to the cultivation of his mind, may find limitless scope for his hopes of intellectual increase. He may, and he should, while pursuing his exhausting labors, enliven his spirit with thoughts like these: "Mind the brightest thing in existence, is that which is the most susceptible of advancement. My Maker, that he might see in me his own image, gave me a mind; and by his grace I have been taught its value, and inclined to prefer the care and education of it before all the delights of sense. Moved by His spirit, I cry after knowledge, and lift up my voice for understanding; I seek for her as silver, and search for her as hid trea-

sure : And I shall gain, if I faint not, the object of my desires ; I shall find myself in possession of a better and still better mind ; I shall be constantly acquiring a more and more perfect use of my powers ; I shall be increasing continually in my ability to think, to analyze, to reason, to discourse ; my thoughts will be becoming more and more just ; my views be enlarging ; my knowledge growing ; my mind, in all respects, rising, expanding, strengthening, stretching forwards and upwards toward the perfection of mental being. Let me but persevere in my disciplinary course, and nothing can intercept the glorious result. Not more irresistibly does the rising sun advance on his way, than my mind will continue to improve under the faithful use of proper means of cultivation." There need be no check certainly to this thrilling anticipation of intellectual advancement, except, at most, in regard to that short twilight season of superannuation, through which a few of mankind pass near the close of life. Nor is it certain that even this exception should always be made, as it is not perhaps evident, that senile dotage might not,

in some instances, be avoided, by judicious discipline, seasonably commenced and never discontinued.

VIII. But while the unbounded improveableness of the mind should constantly inspirit him who is climbing the steep ascent to intellectual excellence, he should keep clearly in view, *what it is* whose improvement he seeks. This is *the whole mind*, and not exclusively one or more of its attributes. The just discipline of the mind, is the discipline, in due measure, of all its powers. Where some of these are cultivated to the neglect of others, the result is intellectual disproportion and general imbecility. Nor is it probable that the favorite faculties themselves will be as well developed and improved, as they would have been under no more than a due share of attention. Let analogy here instruct us. The general health of the body is necessary to the vigorous and full growth of any part; so that if by excessively educating one member, we impair the vital energy of the system, we injure the object of our partiality more, perhaps, than perfect neglect would have done; and thus, doubtless, a par-



tial discipline of the mind has often defeated its own purpose. A youthful student, on a very hasty examination of his peculiar mental structure, perhaps without any examination, thinks that nature designed him for a mathematician or a poet, and determines to nurse, with the utmost assiduity, the particular power which, by destination, is to make him illustrious. Henceforward he remits attention to every study which is not in his own view directly adapted to increase his reasoning or his inventive faculty. The consequence is, the total failure of his unadvised plan. He becomes distinguished for nothing, or nothing but vanity and weakness.

Such, more frequently perhaps than is commonly supposed, is the direct result of disproportioned mental discipline. And is it not what the known nature of the human mind should lead us to expect from the course pursued? Are not the several faculties of the mind, integrant, composing, and constituting one whole; so that one part being absent or defectively developed, the whole is necessarily disordered, and, like a machine in a similar condition, incapable of equal and efficient move-

ment? Nay, to speak with perfect truth, are the mental faculties aught but the simple essential mind itself, regarded in relation to its several states and functions? and, if so, is not the neglect of any one faculty, the neglect of the substance mind? and should not the mind be expected to suffer from such neglect, and the injury to appear in every mental operation and development?

I cannot but think that failure in intellectual education, is to a great extent referable to the cause I am considering. There are comparatively but few minds to which the power of education is to any considerable extent applied; but how much fewer to which it is applied with the assiduity which the high excellence and destination of the human mind demand? And even where it is applied with the greatest diligence, how often is that diligence used without so much as a distinct aim, to discipline all the mind's energies in equal degree, and draw them out into symmetrical development? Some examples there are of what man may become by judicious education, and they are the admiration of the

world. Had such education, every human being's natural right, been general, to what rank in intelligence would not the race have attained? We wonder at the small results of education, but we should rather wonder that the results are so great, considering the extreme want of pains and discretion in conducting the business of education.

IX. I have not intended, by any thing which has been said, to recommend a course of discipline which should disregard original diversity in different mental constitutions, or the mental peculiarity of each individual. A symmetrical intellectual development does not demand such a discipline. On the contrary, no discipline which does not accommodate its appliances to what is peculiar in each mind's make and temperament, is at all suited to produce a well-proportioned or a full intellectual maturity. And I submit this remark as one of prime importance, and deserving a place among first principles, in the science of mental culture. To frame one discipline for every mind, is not less absurd than to prescribe one medicine for every disease, or one dietetic regimen to every invalide

Some minds are originally gifted with one faculty in large, and another in small dimensions: some are surprisingly precocious, and others very late in development: some are quick and others slow in movement: some phlegmatic, and others mercurial in constitutional temper. It is easy to see what must be the result, when minds thus variously constituted are subjected to precisely the same training. Not one of them may attain to its just stature; not one be of full dimensions or well-proportioned; many may be perverted and many spoiled; while by discretion in training all might have become specimens of mental excellence—ornaments, more or less brilliant, to human nature. It is manifest, what scope now presents itself for the exercise of censure upon prevailing practice in the discipline of mind, especially the minds of the young; but I forbear: I cannot, however, suppress the remark, that nothing appears to be of deeper concern to teachers—those who by profession are cultivators of mind—than the most careful attention on their part, to the native as well as the acquired faculties of those particular

minds that Providence commits into their hands, to be trained and educated for life and eternity.

X. There is, however, another observation, which I deem it more important to introduce in this connexion. It is that youth,—and especially those young men, who, having gone through the primary parts of a liberal education, regard themselves as not wholly incompetent to judge rightly of their own mental peculiarities,—may fall into a serious mistake as to this important point. They may mistake in two ways: They may decide justly in respect to their individual idiosyncrasies or peculiarities of mind, yet not take the right course in mental self-training: Or they may misjudge in the former respect. How often has it happened, that young men, feeling in themselves the strong and resistless promptings to certain mental applications, have piously and perhaps justly concluded, that they should cherish these promptings as indications of the Divine Will respecting what they should do with themselves; but have thenceforward made the indulgence of these high natural

propensities, almost the whole of their future education; and thus have weakened all their other powers, and, in a manner already explained, their essential mind itself; and so have defeated their own ardent purpose, and the end of their creation?

The tendencies of the mind in one direction, are often an admonition, not so much that these tendencies are not to be neglected, as that certain others are with greater pains to be elicited and strengthened, so that the mind's balance and symmetry may be preserved. It is, indeed, of the highest moment, that the natural aptitudes of the mind be favored, and sedulously cherished in education. The greatest results may depend upon attention to this point. Many a mind has scarcely become conscious of intellectual life, under quite a considerable course of teaching, until its peculiar bent of nature happened to be fallen in with by disciplinary influence; when at once, new and surprising manifestations of power began to take place. Still nothing were more unwise, than, on making such discoveries as this, forthwith to withdraw attention from the mind's other



faculties, and make the cultivation of the prominent one, the sole object of concern. That one should certainly have paramount care, but the judicious cultivation of the others may be indispensable to its arriving at its destined size and strength.

XI. I spoke of another mistake sometimes made by youthful minds; namely, a misjudgment as to what their original peculiarities are. They take for these, their unjustifiable inclinations. For the peculiarities of their original mental structure, they make no serious search; but their dislike to severe and protracted study, and their preference of what they think will require less pains, is almost invincible; and from their reluctance to think themselves indolent or irresolute, they gladly take these feelings for a bias of nature, pointing out something else as the proper object of their pursuit, than what demands such laborious and tedious application. I need not mention the ordinary result. The noblest of minds giving itself up to idleness or ease, under whatever temptation, gives itself up also to eventual inefficiency and contempt. No mind is so mighty as to

be proof against indolence. Who can tell but that brighter spirits than any now shining in the firmament of fame, have passed away under its influence, unthought of or despised? How many Newtons may be lying in unknown or ignoble graves, because they mistook temptations to self-indulgence, for natural intimations that they should forego a course of intense mental application.

XII. This remark suggests another fundamental maxim. Mind, though of all things the most improveable, is so, only by the workings of *its own self-activity*. It cannot advance otherwise, be the impulses on it what they may, than by advancing itself. It can make no progress by yielding itself passively to any outward influence. It is, I grant, impossible to conceive how it can rationally act,—that is, *as mind*, act at all,—unless there be somewhat out of itself, its own image at least, *objective* in respect to it: and it is also most evident, that all the outward objects or circumstances with which it has intercourse, give it some exercise, and leave on it some impression: and these two facts show how important it is that the most con-



summate wisdom and virtue be employed, in conducting all the plans and processes of intellectual education. Nevertheless, the mind does not advance, is not moved at all, except as it moves itself; and is not the creature, as fatalists teach, but the lord of its circumstances. If its circumstances have decisive influence on it, one way or the other, it makes them decisive, by its own choice or consent. If consciousness ascertains us of any thing, it is this; nor is there a human breast that does not witness against the opposite dogma, as no less a contradiction of universal experience, than of every principle of morality and religion. The mind cannot be in any way injured, neither can it be improved, be its advantages what they may, but by the free exercise of its own activity. To be *self-active*, is the property of all life. The very definition of life, according to the ancients, and it seems to be a true one, is *self-activity*. The mind of man has the highest kind of life; and as far as we know, is all life; it is therefore essential to it to be self-active; and it is not mind, that one is advanced in, but something which mind, as such, disowns, when he advan-

ces without mental activity on his own part. But this cannot, I presume, have escaped any one's consideration. Every living thing that increases at all, does so by the workings of its own life. Thus grows the living plant, the living body, and every other thing that lives and grows. Its increase, according to its kind, is by the inward operations of its own peculiar life. Can it be otherwise as to the mind of man?

XIII. But though the truth now stated, with some degree of emphasis, must be familiar to the reader, it is my fear that he will not give it the influence it should have on every one's manner of seeking intellectual improvement. Too many of those who are engaged in that pursuit, seem to have lost sight of it, in a great degree, plain and obvious as it is. It is practically overlooked, not only by those who hope to become intelligent and learned, as a matter of course, because they live in a university, or in a literary society, and have abundance of books at command, though they are at almost no pains to improve their advantages; but by many others likewise, who seem se-

riously engaged in their studies. There are many of this latter class, who, amid all their zeal for mental improvement, appear not to understand how it is that such improvement is to be acquired. They do, indeed, recognize the necessity of some sort of mental exertion on their own part; they apply themselves to books and lectures, and are much occupied, it may be, night and day; but still they are occupied only as one would be, who should labor to provide himself food, and yet not partake of it in such a way as to be nourished and strengthened by it. What patient thought do these students exercise, in searching out the truth of whatever presents itself to their apprehensive faculty? Or what *intellectual* entertainment do they give to it? Are their minds impregnated, inspirited, moved to reflection and comparison, to analysis and inquiry, to abstraction and classification, or to any thing analogous to the processes of rumination and digestion? Do they pause to consider the *how*, the *why*, and the *wherefore*, of what meets their thought? Do they muse, and pry, and penetrate into unexplored recesses of truth?

No; they doubt, perhaps, whether such free and extended thinking be pious, or modest, or lawful; more probably they have not patience to endure so difficult and slow a method of cultivating the mind. Be the reason what it may, the result is, from the nature of mind, that they make little or no solid improvement. Something they may gain by that exercise of attention which they give to the products of other minds; they come in this way to know that things of this and that name or class, are among the materials of universal knowledge; but with the things themselves, they have no just acquaintance; and from such intercourse as they have with them, it is, perhaps, questionable, whether, on the whole, their minds are more injured or improved. They acquire that sort of knowledge which inflates, but does not strengthen; which makes one wise in conceit, but not in discourse and action; which produces confidence without clear conviction; which capacitates men to despise and denounce others, but not to forbear, and be gentle, and give instruction with meekness.

They must needs move slowly, who would move surely and successfully up the hill of knowledge. Haste does only harm; things must have their natural course, and they who cannot wait, should cease all expectation, and all hope, and betake themselves to some other pursuit. I wish I could write in every student's heart, that beautiful saying of ancient wisdom, "Truth is the daughter of Time." How many hurry through books and systems, as if rapidity in mental growth and in reading were the same thing. Not such as these become mighty in intellectual power; this is the attainment of those sons of patience, who pause a year, it may be, on a volume or a theory, before they can exactly pronounce concerning it. They pause for reflection, and while they pause, life springs within them with new strength; their minds grow apace; they extend their views; they see the wide and ever enlarging relations of things, and thus do they become more instructed by continued reflection on one book or page, than the other class of students by the reading of a life-time. I repeat the sentiment: The human mind does not otherwise

advance than by the exertion of its own living power. Things exterior to itself may favor its growth, but cannot make it grow. Converse with books, and lectures, and schools, will not suffice. Knowledge cannot be read into it, or lectured into it, or introduced into it in any way, except as the mind itself draws it in, and digests it, by its own patient thought and reflection.

XVI. And with this remark another should be connected. Not only must the mind that would gain the just size and use of its powers, depend for that result on the inward workings of its own mysterious life, but it must designedly and diligently exert itself to keep those workings *free of restraint*. It must assert and maintain its liberty, which, from its circumstances, it cannot do without great decision and effort. The importance of the mind's being free of all restriction, and especially of a blind, servile reliance on other minds, in order to a just exercise and development of its faculties, cannot be overrated. Nothing in the philosophy of mental discipline deserves more consideration. What remarkable examples have we of the congenial-



ness of freedom to the mind of man ? Some who now rank among the first of human minds, were almost classed with those of bare mediocrity, until they escaped from the yoke of an early bondage, and felt the elevating and enlarging power of mental independence. Perhaps there are few thinking men who are not, to some extent, examples of this influence. Who that is much addicted to thorough investigation has not sometimes found himself at a stand in his thoughts while looking to other minds for aid ; but after ceasing from that dependence, and applying himself to the subject as exclusively in his own strength as if it had never before engaged human attention, advanced with the utmost ease, and with wonder at his former embarrassment ? While I remember instances such as these, of the influence of freedom on the operations of the mind, I recoil with indignation at the evil of intellectual slavery. That the mass of men, however, should escape at once from this base bondage, desirable as it may be, is out of all hope :—may even the expectation be indulged, that those heaven-selected few will be entirely emancipated,

whose destination in life is to labor for the deliverance of their fellows? Is it not possible, to be too confident even in this expectation. A mind which could retain an independence on all created minds and influences, would still be a slave, unless free of self-conceit and the vassalage of sin. Here is the prime slavery of the human intellect; and he is but a specimen of the worst kind of madness, who boasts himself of mental liberty, while subject to ambition or any form of selfishness, or is a stranger to his ignorance and nothingness in the presence of the great God.

XV. A truly free mind is of course an humble one, which, conscious of its moral imperfection, can make no boastful pretensions of its liberty. It is modest in these pretensions, in proportion as the ground for them is strong and extensive. And this fact leads me to mention, as another essential principle in the philosophy of our subject, that *humility*, not less than liberty, lies at the basis of all solid improvement of the mind. Not only has a proud mind no true acquaintance with God and his truth; it can have but little knowledge, and no just appreciation of the powers



and products of other human minds. What limit is there to that young person's self-idolatry, who can take but a glance at the various productions of human genius and learning, and retain a high conceit of his own powers and attainments? There is much of error, and much of useless speculation, and much that is pernicious in these productions; but there is so much of truth, and wisdom, and power in them also, that to know them but imperfectly, were enough to make any single mind amazed at its own ignorance and short-coming. What more unpromising in a young man then, than to be growing in self-confidence and self-admiration, while pursuing a preparatory course of study? Seest thou a man, a young man especially, wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him. A student of this class studies unquestionably to worse than no purpose. He thinks himself in possession of perfect independence of mind; but who, to one capable of judging in such a case, appears in more pitiable imbecility and bondage?

XVI. It may be useful to note one way in which the quality just recommended should

be expected to develop itself in students during their academical course. No one who has the true spirit of self-discipline, and especially this element of it, can disregard exact system and order in study ; or think that wise and good men, who have passed, and passed successfully, through a disciplinary course, are less likely to originate a judicious plan to be pursued generally by those who are coming after them, than they in their inexperience can originate for themselves. It is therefore, ordinarily, the mark of wisdom and the presage of success in young students, of whatever vigor of mind, or however advanced in their studies, to subject themselves to the settled regimen of the schools with which they are connected ; to give their time and strength to the prescribed books and subjects, and to observe most rigidly the prescribed hours for study recreation and prayer. That they, who in these matters follow their own contrariant inclinations, make but little solid progress, is not less accordant with fact, than with the reason of things and the sanction of the Divine law.

XVII. I cannot forbear subjoining, on this

topic, that it is preëminently of the spirit of sound self-discipline, to cherish and exhibit a peculiar modesty, in relation to Christian theology, the subject-matter, comprehensively, of the studies of a preacher. Theology, it is true, so far as it proceeds beyond the certain announcements of revelation, consists in results of human reasoning and philosophizing. So far, of course, it should, like any other science, be examined and judged of freely, in the independent and just exercise of reason. It is the greatest possible violation of humility—an arrogation of the Divine authority,—to demand an implicit belief in any system of theology any farther than this. It is an assumption of the prerogative of the Most High. We should therefore think freely, think independently, think thoroughly for ourselves, on the subjects of theological as well as of every other science. In respect even to the first principles of revealed religion, there is no irreverence in the utmost liberty of thought, provided it be not licentiousness, under liberty's cloak. Nevertheless, it is a profane and haughty spirit that moves not softly, and tremblingly, and

with great self-diffidence, over all the ground of Christian theology. It were a manifest denial that the Scriptures are an inspired revelation, to suppose that the substantial truths which they contain remain yet to be ascertained ; and those may see plainly, with whom they class themselves, who hesitate to adopt what has been the common faith of the Christian church in every age.—Besides, there is something, in a manner sacred, in the uninspired thoughts and speculations of sound Christian divines. Among these authors are not a few of the best and greatest of mankind ; martyrs, confessors, and reformers ; men of giant understandings, and hearts as large as the universe ; and they have given us in their immortal works, the best fruits of their labors. I need not ask whether those can be very modest or very intelligent youths, who can hastily discard, or irreverently controvert, the doctrines and opinions of such men.

**XVIII.** I have only to add in closing these familiar remarks on the principles of mental discipline, that the mind, like the body, needs its refectations and its remedies, and that want

of attention to these may defeat every end of discipline, and be fatal to intellectual progress. Here, however, opens a very wide field, which I must not enter. Let me only say, that I deem this subject worthy of a much more thorough and philosophical examination than it has yet received—an examination, which, I trust, some one competent to the task will give to it. The importance of bodily temperance and exercise has been much insisted on; but the mind has a being of its own, independent of the body; and much as it may suffer by its union to the body, from corporeal infirmities, it has independent ailments and infirmities of its own; and if the body can injure the mind by being ill-conditioned, the mind, by the same cause, can injure the body, even to the speedy destruction of its life. Whence, I infer, that plans for promoting bodily health merely, omit much the more important part of what is needful, for the vigorous health of the mind. There are food, medicine, and exercise for the body, and these by their good influence on the body, may indirectly benefit the mind; but there are food, medicine, and exercise also

for the mind ; and the withholding of these may keep both mind and body diseased, and languishing, beyond hope of cure by human means.



## II.

### STUDIES OF A PREACHER.

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MAN can undertake no business requiring a more perfect use of his faculties than preaching the gospel. And no one more than a preacher needs versatility of genius, universal knowledge, and every intellectual and moral accomplishment of which our nature is capable.

But the individual is unknown who has attained to preëminence in every thing; and experience shows that the way to make no substantial improvement is to have no appropriateness of pursuit. It is not the wont of those who rise to uncommon excellence, to permit themselves to wander, without specific appliance or purpose, through the cyclo-

pede of knowledge ; but to compel themselves to labor at distinct tasks within prescribed bounds, beyond which there must be no trespass, until the field they define has been thoroughly cultivated. Indeed, there are few who find themselves able to make much advance out of their own appropriate departments. The distinguished statesmen, civilians, naturalists, scholars of all classes, give their main regard to the matters of their respective vocations, and are, in proportion to their degrees of elevation, absorbed in these matters. Above all men, a preacher who would make full proof of his powers, and commend himself to God and man, a workman, in his great calling, who needeth not to be ashamed, should devote himself perfectly, to advancement in those branches of knowledge, which pertain immediately to his peculiar sphere of labor. That sphere is so comprehensive in itself, and so wide, so momentous in its relations, that no man, however gifted and powerful, should presume to think himself competent fully to occupy it. Indeed, this is the sphere in which the angels would rejoice to employ their great powers, and for the com-



plete occupation of which even they would be inadequate.

I propose to take a brief survey of the preacher's field of intellectual labor ; to define the limits of his daily mental application, the chief pursuits in the prosecution of which, the energies of his mind should be steadfastly employed, to the exclusion of all irrelevant or interfering studies.

I. Among these, the first, last, and midst, is THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE. As the great end of the sacred office is to impress the contents of the Bible on the hearts of men, so, in subserviency to that end, the great business of those who exercise that office is to acquire, as perfectly as possible, the meaning and spirit of that Divine book. All creeds, systems, theories, sciences, are to be tried by the Bible, and to be rejected as falsifying the divine veracity, if they cannot abide the trial. To a man who understands the literary character of the Bible, and remembers the fallibility of the human mind, and the influence of depravity in obscuring evidence and perverting reason, this is a motive of resistless power to the utmost diligence, candour, and se-

riousness in searching out the real doctrine of the sacred text. Who that does not forget how soon he is to answer for himself at the bar of Heaven, would choose to take part in that business, of which not a little has been done, wherein the Bible is made to condemn what it in fact approves, and to approve what it condemns, and to speak with authority where it has maintained a perfect silence? He who demands for his own utterances the reverence which is due only to the oracles of God, should first be sure, that those utterances and the divine oracles have precisely the same sense; otherwise he is a worm of the dust arrogating the place of the supreme intelligence and the supreme majesty of the universe.

But a preacher who would fully develop the power of his function, must aim to declare in his official ministrations, not only truth, but the entire truth of God—the entire sense of the Bible, on all the subjects of which it treats. Nor should he content himself with a bare statement of the propositions which the Bible contains on the various topics of theology. He should study that book

to make himself acquainted with its treasures of language, its eloquence, its poetry, its depths of learning. All books, in comparison, are poor of thought, of feeling, of expression, of whatever gives power and excellence to discourse. The subjects of sermons, the materials which enter into their structure, their arguments and illustrations, their spirit and manner, their grace, beauty and strength of style, should be derived as much as possible from this celestial source. In short, no book, no study, except as it may assist him in better understanding and explaining the Scriptures, is of much advantage to a minister of the gospel.

The study of the Bible, therefore, is, comprehensively, the only study of preachers. So it is forcibly declared to be by St. Paul.\* It is a study deep and ample enough to exhaust a thousand of the ordinary terms of human life.—It is not fit that I should here speak of the manner in which this study should be conducted : I will only say, in the words of one of the first of the Christian Fathers, *tenentem*

\* Ταῦτα μελέτα, ἐν τούτοις ἴσθι. 1 Tim. iv. 15.

*sacros codices somnus abrepat, et cadentem faciem pagina sancta suscipiat.* Spare not a moment from the study of the Bible, which sleep does not demand for the resuscitation of your exhausted powers.

II. It should be one of the leading objects of a preacher's life to enlarge, as much as possible, his acquaintance with divine truth, in its systematic relations and affinities. Though a complete system of doctrines is nowhere presented, in Scripture, in one digested view; yet the truths of inspiration do pertain to a system, and like truths in the natural world, admit of classification. That any one has ever made or will ever make a perfect arrangement of these truths, I do not affirm, and do not believe. They are parts of a system, vast as the universe, and extending from eternity to eternity; and they are so sundered, interspersed, and interwoven into one another, as they lie every where in Scripture, that it is doubtless beyond the power of man to set them together exactly in their proper places, and in perfectly systematic order. Nor can the damage be estimated, which these truths have suffered in statement and exhibi-

tion, by attempts at systematizing them, not conducted with a just sense of the sacredness and difficulty of that work. Still the relations which the truths of revelation sustain towards each other, as component parts of a system, are to some extent clearly perceptible by us; and the process of classifying them, must no more be abandoned, than an endeavor to acquire the true knowledge of them. They are truly understood, no further than they are seen in their systematic affinities and bearings. In divinity, as well as in law and physics, to obtain true knowledge is not to obtain bare historical information, but correct and enlarged views of the connexion of things with one another, and their mutual, various, and interminable relations and tendencies.

It is incumbent on preachers, as their great business with mankind, to explain, defend, and enforce revealed truth; but *power* to do this, depends essentially, on a systematic knowledge of that truth; or a knowledge of it as inter-connected and mutually related in its various departments and ramifications. It is most manifest, that no one can set forth



any part of truth symmetrically, precisely defined, and in fitting color and costume, any further than he has understood and digested it in its systematic relations to other truth. He who pretends to go further with his explanations or descriptions than he has gone in systematic understanding, advances in the dark, and knows not whereof he affirms, and whither his random assertions tend. Either we should not attempt to impart solid instruction from the pulpit, or we should constantly study to make ourselves thoroughly systematic theologians.

Let me not be misunderstood in what I have said of the knowledge in question. It is not knowledge to be obtained by conning over, however sedulously, a formula of faith, or a body of divinity—another mans' line of things made ready to our hand. It is one thing to know, that such and such are the definitions and statements, comprised in a certain system; and another thing to understand clearly the congruities, and bearings, and connexions, that is, in other words, the true meaning of those statements. The first is bare historical knowledge, which a child

may acquire; the last is the result of independent and patient thought, and of thorough investigation of the principles and tendencies of things. This is what is needed. It is not to know what others have done in the business of systematizing divine truth, that will qualify preachers for successfully defending and inculcating it; but to be able in some measure to systematize it for themselves.

It is to be lamented that philosophical speculations are too much intermingled in our systems of divinity. But theology and philosophy have never been dissociated, and never will be, unless theology ceases to be a science. In all ages there have been different theological systems, and different systems of philosophy also. And the difference in the latter has produced, and I might almost say constituted, almost the whole of the difference in the former. Philosophy confessedly has not yet arrived at perfection; and he would speak unadvisedly who should affirm that there was no intermixture of error in the best system of theology extant. In the business then of tracing out the systematic order and connexions of revealed truth, if



ministers of the gospel would secure themselves against mistake, they must, along with profound respect for what has been done in this work, by other human minds, cherish in themselves a spirit of independence of man. Let them remember who it is that hath said to them, "Call no man father upon earth; for one is your father who is in heaven." It is only by following this counsel that they can avoid the danger and the responsibility of teaching for doctrines the commandments or opinions of men. But their distrust in man should include self-distrust, since they are men also. While pursuing the highest kind of knowledge, the true policy, the indispensable condition of success, is to keep the eye single, the mind humble and ready to surrender its own pre-conceptions, and embrace the truth wherever it may be found, or from whatever source it may proceed. It is the truest wisdom to do this: it is in their youth that men of vigorous and untrammelled minds have most confidence in their own speculations. Increased knowledge of the true system of the gospel, the result only of long-continued application, extended

through the various departments of the field of divine doctrine, and many times renewed, lowers one's estimate of his own attainments, and makes him more a learner at the end, than he was at the beginning of his course. There was not the least affectation of modesty in the remark of the great Newton to his friends, on their expressing admiration at his sublime discoveries—"to myself I seem to have been as a child playing on the seashore, while the immense ocean of truth lay unexplored before me."

III. Another of the studies to which the life of a preacher should be given, is the History of theological opinion. I place this, rather than ecclesiastical history in general, among the chief subjects of his constant application; because the general history of the Church is mainly useful to him, as a means of acquainting him with dogmatic history, and must be diligently pursued as a matter of necessity, in order to make any proficiency in the latter branch of learning. And in remarking on this topic I shall take into view both the present and the past.

That a preacher should be accurately

acquainted with the peculiar doctrines, or statements of doctrine, which prevail in his own times, is obviously essential to the just and faithful performance of his work. He cannot dispense with this knowledge in doing the business of popular indoctrination. The people have religious teaching of every description. The consequences are, that some embrace radical error ; some are harassed by objections which they cannot answer, and remain unsettled and halting between two opinions ; and some, though settled and steadfast in substantial truth, are not without intellectual difficulties on some points, which greatly interfere with their peace and their sanctification. Instruction suited to make salutary impressions on minds thus variously influenced by prevalent religious opinions and arguments, cannot be given, without acquaintance with these arguments and opinions on the part of the instructor. It may not be necessary to bring them into distinct notice ; but he surely is not a competent teacher of truth to the common people, who does not both know them, and know how to refute them. Statements made by preachers in ignorance

of objections existing in the minds of the hearers, and which are not virtually answers to those objections, will not be satisfactory or edifying to them; nor are they apt to be convinced, by any arguments or eloquence, of the truth of positions which appear to them so unadvisedly, or so unfairly laid down. The excellence of popular teaching consists, in a great degree, in silently anticipating objections, and blending in the general strain and spirit of the discourse, the matter of solid answers and refutations. Such teaching should seldom be controversial; but while it should make few direct assaults on points of error, it should manifestly be, on its own part, unanswerable and invulnerable.

The chief cavils against the gospel are in substance the same in all times, and are almost universally known; but while the substance of these cavils remains unchanged, their forms and modifications are indefinitely various; and it has been justly remarked, that "as the Christian ministry is established for the instruction of men throughout every age, in truth and holiness, it must adapt itself to

the ever-shifting scenes of the moral world, and stand ready to repel the attacks of impiety and error, in whatever form they may appear." Opinions in some respects new,—new at least to the common people, are almost daily introduced; and besides, old errors are sustained by new sophistries; and the preacher who would keep pace, in minute acquaintance, with the march of novelty in the theological world, especially at this day, when the means are so multiplied for accelerating the progress of thought through society, will here find sufficient occupation for all the time he can well spare, from the immediate business of his calling.

I have not expressed the only reason why the knowledge of prevalent theological opinions is important to preachers of the gospel. All new opinions ought not to be, without examination, denounced as erroneous. Paradoxes are not necessarily falsehoods. The faith once delivered to the saints, has in all essential points, been always understood; but no man has been so perfectly acquainted with it as to preclude the possibility or desirableness of enlarging and correcting his



views. The meaning of Scripture, certainly, has not been as fully disclosed on all points, as it will be by the progress of time. The providence of God is constantly reflecting light upon his word, making some things plain to one generation, which to another were obscure; and, by correcting and enlarging the theology of the Church, is improving her general character, and preparing her for future and greater triumphs. Nor is the remark of the great Dr. Owen, "that however some men may deride new light, he will not serve the will of God in this generation, who sees not beyond the line of foregoing ages," less applicable or pertinent, to other and to our times, than it was to his own.

But the knowledge of the current theological speculations and literature is important on another account. Admitting the amount of knowable truth to be invariable in all ages, the definitions and statements of that truth, in popular teaching, should not always be given in precisely the same terms. The statements of one age may not answer for another. The early Christian Fathers used forms of expression concerning the Trinity, for example,

which, however suitable to their times, would not meet the exigencies of ours. The progress of discussion, since their day, has exhibited that great subject\* in many points of view, to which their attention had not been directed; and a definition which did not cover all those points, would be to us no definition. And the same remark is true concerning statements of doctrine made by the Reformers, and by divines of later days. Within our own remembrance, definitions were given of some fundamental points,\* which, if a preacher should content himself with at present, might cause his orthodoxy with some, and his intelligence and good sense with others, to be more than suspected.

Advances have been made in intellectual philosophy, in science, and the arts; error has taken new positions, and used new fallacies; and the consequences are, that orthodox theology has in some respects widened, and in some limited the scope of its affirmations; has become more careful in exhibiting the grounds of reasoning, and more rigidly exact

\* For example, native depravity, the Spirit's agency in regeneration, &c.



in the use of terms ; and, in short, has adopted such modifications of definition, of diction, and of proof, as its modified relations to religious error, and the generally altered character of the age, have rendered indispensable.

The history of the theology of former times should likewise be a subject of a preacher's deep and constant research. Nothing tends more to thorough enlarged and exact acquaintance with the doctrines of the gospel, and to a clear mode of stating them, than a minute knowledge of this history, or being well versed in comparative theology. To know, for instance, the peculiar views held by Augustine concerning the doctrines of depravity and the atonement, and to compare them with the peculiarities of Calvin, and Owen, and the Scotch and New England divines on these points,—to understand well the different modes of discrimination, reasoning, and statement, prevalent in different periods concerning these subjects, must give great advantages for obtaining the most enlightened views of them ; not to mention the liberalizing influence which such knowledge would exert, in reference to the

controversies respecting them, prevalent in subsequent periods, and in our own churches.

IV. Another subject of the highest importance, and deserving the closest and unremitting attention, is Anthropology, or the science of human nature.

Revelation, of necessity, takes for granted that those to whom it comes have some knowledge of themselves — some acquaintance with the properties and functions of their own godlike human nature. The consciousness in man of having a rational mind and moral feelings, is indispensable to his knowing what intelligence and morality are in his Maker. It is through this consciousness that he is capable of understanding his Maker's statements and communications respecting divine and eternal things. If this consciousness should be by any means destroyed, revelation would be as unintelligible to man, as it is to the brutes. If it be blunted or perverted, proportionably so must be his perception of revealed things. Let a man be in any way brought to understand reason and truth, wisdom and folly, good and evil, to be, in respect to himself and his fel-

low-men, different from what they are in reality, and when in a divine revelation these things are spoken of in connexion with the nature, works, and ways of God, he will understand them as different from what they really are, in respect to these subjects. If the revelation should undertake to explain them, the *explanation* could not be understood, since, as often as the explanatory words should be used, man would judge of them according to his own primary consciousness and impressions. As an explanation can give a blind man no true notion of color, neither could it give a man destitute of moral consciousness, or with that consciousness radically perverted, a true notion of the divine perfection. Nothing, in short, is more clear, than the necessity of man's not being wrong in his own consciousness and conceptions of things, as pertaining to himself, in order to his being right, in his conceptions of things, as pertaining to God.

Now, that knowledge which men have, as they are by revelation presumed to have, of their own nature and its functions, is to the generality of mankind, undigested, reduced to no

science, but exists in a vague consciousness, rather than in distinct and definitely expressed conceptions. They know wisdom and folly, good and evil, but they have formed no systems, either of intellectual or ethical philosophy. Such systems, however, have been formed. Philosophers have formed them, from the admiration which they have conceived, of the noble nature of man; and Divines, also, to improve and mature their knowledge of God as exhibited in his works and word, and to enable them more perfectly to inculcate that knowledge. Philosophical systems concerning human nature, are in existence; and whether this be matter of lamentation or not, they exert decisive influence on the cause of theology, and of preaching. The science of human nature and of theology, are so essentially and perfectly related to each other, that the latter is necessarily moulded and fashioned by the former. Night does not more certainly follow day, than that if there be a change in the science of the human mind, there will be a correspondent change in the science of religion. Let new theories of the human faculties and

their operations become prevalent, and it will be vain to endeavor to preclude new theories of the attributes, purposes, truths, and government of God ; since the former are the *media* by which the latter are apprehended and understood.

It is therefore indispensable that good theologians and preachers, be good anthropologists ; well versed in the science of human nature—in intellectual and moral philosophy. Theology excepted, it is in truth the noblest of the sciences ; and the greatest of human minds, in all ages, have been absorbed in its cultivation. It will always be pursued by men of intellectual power and activity. It deserves all the attention that has been or will be given to it. Its expanding and invigorating influence on all the faculties, its tendency to promote an elevated cast of thought and character, and, I will add, notwithstanding what is often alleged to the contrary, its friendliness to humble faith and sincere piety, entitle it to the most studious regard of all who are capable of intellectual application and improvement. But its connexion with all justness of thinking,

and discourse in divine matters, makes its cultivation by preachers of the gospel, an object of the highest importance, next to the study of the Scriptures. And the writings which have appeared in this department of learning, contain so much vigor and comprehensiveness of thought, so much of the greatness of that very human mind whose structure and laws they undertake to examine, that it is questionable whether any uninspired books have ever been written better suited to give a healthy and improving exercise to all the intellectual and moral powers.

V. I have but one thing to add to this sketch of the preacher's field of intellectual labor. Not only should he study the science of the human mind, but also the science of Public Speaking, the chief means by which he is to exert influence on that mind.

It is unquestionable, that whatever of true religion or virtue has existed among men, is referable to the pulpit as an instrument, more than to all things else ; and its indirect bearings of human improvement in all respects will appear by considering, what would have been the intellectual moral and civil state of



mankind, without it. Still I must think that its legitimate energies have been imperfectly developed. Remembering that the pulpit is the divinely ordained means for the perfect evangelization of the world, the fact of the general irreligion and ignorance of mankind, must convince us that its powers remain to a great extent undiscovered, unless we would make God the author of inadequate arrangements.

A favorable change in the influence of the pulpit, is among the other changes which are anticipated by those who expect the triumphant advance of Christianity through the earth; but this change will not take place by chance, or by miracle, or in any other way, than by attention and pains directed to the purpose of bringing it about.

We have heard of the almost incredible exertions, used by the great speakers of Greece and Rome, continually to the end of life, to give themselves strength and success in their public addresses: is it to the praise of preachers of the gospel, that much or little as they may study theology, and other sciences and arts, they have taken almost



no pains to search out the secret of power in public speaking ?

The necessity of the concurrence of divine influence with success in preaching,—a fact which more than any thing else seems to have occasioned negligence and impotence in that kind of discourse,—has been lamentably perverted, in being made contributory to that result. Did Christ, who spake as never man spake, and the Apostles, whose tongues were almost as the tongues of angels, think that discourse on divine subjects may be intrinsically feeble, because success comes from the Holy Spirit ? If we look narrowly on the one hand, into the history of those preachers whose professed confidence in the Spirit makes them desultory and negligent in discourse ; and on the other hand, into the history of the primitive ministers of the gospel, who, while they prayed as if they could do nothing in discourse, preached as if every thing depended on the manner of their preaching ; we shall find much reason to think, that neglecting to acquire the elements of power in preaching, is resolvable, not into a consciousness of dependence on the Spirit for

success, but rather into a want of that sacred feeling. One way in which the Spirit works to secure success, is by stirring up ministers to take the pains which are necessary to render them masterly in discourse; to give them a mouth and wisdom which all their adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

Among the things to be attended to in pursuing the acquisition of power in speaking, is the cultivation of the most perfect acquaintance with the energies of language. To some persons it may seem but laborious trifling, to be intensely engaged in studying out words and phrases, and the structure of sentences; but it is not so, unless it be a worthless acquisition to be able to write and speak with power. The judgments of men vary on this subject, in proportion to their respective measures of experience and proficiency in the use of language. If we could obtain the opinions of such authors as Horace, in latin; or Bacon, Addison and Robert Hall, in english; and in the sacred tongue, that most wise "preacher who sought to find out acceptable words;" we should think more

highly of the study in question. What careful writer has not remarked how the entire character of a statement has been changed,—has passed from ambiguity to clearness, from feebleness to strength, from awkwardness to grace, by the substitution of one epithet for another, or by the insertion; or even simply by the omission of an epithet? He surely is a stranger to the elements of power in speech, who does not endeavor to be skilful in the use of words.

It has been too common with preachers to aim, in expression, at little more than accuracy; or rather, to aim at accuracy of *conception*; supposing, if that be attained, expression will of course be correct. But bare correctness of expression does not suffice for the preacher's purpose. His object is not to prevent men from falling into mistakes, but to give truth omnipotent power over their hearts and conduct. To this end the most perfect precision may not be what is needed or desirable. There may be too much precision. Perhaps it were better if accuracy should be disregarded, and the thought be invested with metaphor, or presented in some bold and

striking figure. It was in this way, that our Saviour, above all persons who ever used human language, was accustomed to deal with the minds of men.

So far are clearness and comprehensiveness of conception from securing strength, the quality of chief importance in discourse spoken to a popular assembly,—that in respect to such an assembly, it may lead to impotence and unintelligibleness. Comprehensive views are apt to be expressed in comprehensive or abstract language, which to the common ear is not the language of power. Is not this proof, that preachers, instead of contenting themselves with exactness of conceptions, should, in proportion as they attain to such conceptions, increase their diligence in the study of style and language? What pains must have been taken by the great Father of modern philosophy, in order to have given the abstractions of his mind the simplicity, pungency, and power, in which we find them expressed in his great works?

There is a great diversity in the natural aptitudes of men, in the matter before us. In some a command of language seems almost a

constitutional gift: but there are inequalities in all our natural endowments, and where nature has done little, it is often only an indication that industry should do more. Shall those who have taken speaking as their business, be content with dry accuracy of expression, because it will cost them pains to acquire the use of a rich vocabulary? This is an acquisition seldom made even by those who have the best faculties and advantages, without great and protracted labor. The man who has become eminent in the higher powers of speech, has probably excelled others in his labors, quite as much as in his attainments. Perfection, here, as in every thing else, is attained by patient application and in slow degrees. It is not committing words, or the definitions of words, to memory, that gives command of language. This command consists in being able to apply words in expressing the thoughts, and shades of thought, which by every possible use and combination of them, they are adapted to express. One man, with comparatively a few words, will express more ideas, and express them more

powerfully, than another with the whole vocabulary of the language.

Another of the means of eminence in public speaking, is the cultivation of those intellectual powers which are chiefly concerned in it : of which I can only say at present, that the principal, are the faculty of reasoning or abstraction ; of invention, by which we discover the media of proof, and trace the resemblances and relations of things to one another ; of imagination, by which description and painting are performed ; and, finally, of memory.

But there should be maintained a discipline of sentiment and feeling, as well as of intellect, with reference to power in speaking. There are certain spiritual affections and habitudes of mind, which should receive at least equal cultivation, with the intellectual powers called into requisition. It was the frame of his soul, as much as his doctrine, which caused it to be said of Jesus Christ, *never man spake like that man*. His doctrine was not superior to that of the Apostles ; it was the purity of feeling, the love of truth, the deep sense of eternal things, the benevo-



lence for men, the zeal for God, which filled the soul of our Saviour, that imparted such resistless power to his utterances. It was this that made his doctrine itself so remarkable. Whitefield, the greatest of modern preachers, used to prepare himself for the pulpit, not so much by arranging his thoughts and studying his expressions, and his action, for which he was so remarkable, as by bathing his spirit in heavenly influences. It was the agony of prayer, more than the agony of thought, that made his eloquence the wonder of his times. This is a matter of the deepest moment to the interests of religion, and the day is coming, when it will be so esteemed by the ministry. The universal spread of the gospel will be preceded by the labors of a ministry, not less learned, nor less given to study and elaborate writing, than their predecessors; but more like the Apostles in the business of disciplining the heart with direct reference to the exercise of addressing assemblies of men in the name of Heaven.

A minister who appears in the pulpit not to meet a professional call, but to speak to his fellow-creatures on the infinite affairs of



eternity ; impressed more by the divine presence than by that of the assembly ; so subdued and pervaded by the powers of his subject, that he can have no concern about the opinions of men ; jealous not for his own reputation, but for the cause of truth and of human salvation ; relying not on himself, however well prepared for his work, but on the secret influences of the Holy Spirit ; and assured that his message, however received, will not be a vain one, nor return void to him by whom he was commissioned to deliver it—a minister who preaches with his soul exercised by such sentiments and emotions, will, without fail, preach with the purest eloquence and with irresistible power.

There are too many preachers who are careful to make all that preparation for the pulpit, which will secure them against a loss of reputation for intellect and knowledge, who yet leave this more important part of the preparatory work greatly neglected. Hence, doubtless, more than from every cause besides, the difference in result, between modern and apostolical preaching. We have no account of an eminently successful

preacher in any age, who did not give his chief concern, in preparing for the pulpit, to the preparation of his heart. Let those who would understand well the elements of pulpit-power, examine into the matter, in the light which the biographies of such men as Flavel, Baxter, and Whitefield reflect upon it. Luther remarked, after having nearly finished his great course of service, "I am now an old man, and have been a long time employed in the business of preaching; but I never ascend the pulpit without trembling."

### III.

## POWER IN SPEAKING.

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THE structure and secret workings of the human mind, are scarcely more wonderful than the powers of SPEECH,—the means by which that mind mainly reveals itself.

Man has exerted great influence with the pen ; but the superiority of spoken to written discourse, strikingly appears, among many other instances, in the example of the celebrated Whitefield ; whose sermons, as read, are not remarkable for strength ; but, as spoken by himself, they were specimens of persuasive power, of which there have been no parallels among men since the days of inspiration.

The faculty of speech, like all other hu-

man endowments, is of very different degrees in different persons. One man opens his mouth in an assembly but to infuse lethargy ; another, on the same subject, and the same side, and of inferior abilities in other respects, speaks in sentences of electricity and flame, and keeps his hearers filled to the last, with the intensest emotion.

It is chiefly by means of human speech, that God maintains and advances his spiritual kingdom among men. The laws of his empire ; the facts, principles, and wide relations and bearings of the gospel ; in short, all the moral truths which he employs in saving men and glorifying himself ; are by this means, more than every other, unfolded and enforced. It is principally through public speaking, that God has proposed to deliver his creation from the bondage of corruption, and make all things new in the civil and religious state of man.

The *laws* of speech—the principles by which it is governed in its just and efficient use, are the same in sacred as in common application. It is powerful, not tame and lifeless speaking, that the Holy Spirit ordinarily

makes most effectual in reclaiming men from the paths of sin. The most successful preachers, are those who in their discourses observe most perfectly the laws according to which power in public speaking universally displays itself.

The elements of power in speaking, are partly inherent in the structure of the discourse itself; and partly extrinsic or accidental to it, relating to those auxiliary circumstances which contribute to ensure a discourse attention and success. It is my present intention to do little more than enumerate the principal of these elements.

I. Importance belongs to the subject of a powerful discourse. It is only deep emotion that prompts the tones and utterances of eloquence, and no trivial theme can excite such emotion. Power in utterance is the result of power in intellectual conception and emotion; and such power must have greatness in its object. The experience of every one attests the truth of this statement. How differently does he speak, who earnestly pleads for his country's honor, or for the life of a fellow-creature, or for the salvation of the human soul

from everlasting death, from him who has no other object, than to please men, or merely to meet a professional call.

II. But he who would speak with genuine power, should not only confine himself to matters of importance, but in speaking of such matters should take the side of TRUTH. Truth is the law, the food, the strength, the delight of rational being. To commune deeply with truth is to acquire power; to speak of truth after long and deep communion with it, is, almost unavoidably, to exert great power upon others. I need not stay to show what advantages in speaking, truth gives its advocate over him who has the side of error to defend. How often, amidst a distracting diversity of opinions and arguments, has the mere statement of the truth, from judicious lips, proved at once decisive, and put all debate and all doubt to rest. A day will come, when, in respect to those matters which have more divided mankind than all others, the only matters of importance, comparatively—I mean the principles and ways of the divine government—one judgment will be formed by all



rational beings; when conviction of the rectitude of that government shall perfectly pervade the intelligent universe. This conviction will be the direct result not of physical omnipotence; but simply of a just exhibition of truth.

III. It contributes greatly to power in speaking, that the subject of the discourse be one of personal concern to the hearers. It is impossible for a speaker to be interested himself, by what neither does nor should interest his hearers. The mere impression, on the contrary, that what he is about to discourse of, is what will, of itself, awaken strong feeling in the auditory, tends to stir up his spirit into intense exertion, and thus to prepare him to express himself with ease to himself, and also with great effect.

The subjects of preaching concern all mankind alike, and concern them infinitely more than all things else. The mass of men, however, under the sway of the spirit of the world, are insensible to their relations to these infinite themes. And preachers, for the most part, have too little spirituality, to be moved as they should be by this

alarming fact. When, as at a remarkable effusion of the Spirit, the ministers of the word speak, and the people hear, under a vivid impression of the reality of unseen things, and their relations to them, it is most forcibly manifest, how unmeasurably the power of discourse may be enhanced by the personal concern which the hearers have in its subject.

IV. It greatly heightens power, when the subject, besides being of general interest to the hearers, is adapted particularly to classes, circumstances, and seasons. Many a speech has been thought, and justly thought, to have been very eloquent, not because it was intrinsically powerful, or because it was well pronounced, but because the speaker was wise in suiting his subject to the peculiar state and needs of his hearers. It was eloquent relatively to them, though not so in itself. A word which rebukes a man in crime, or comforts him in trouble, or relieves him in perplexity, is a word of power, though spoken with stammering lips. It is this, above all extrinsic things, which gives a discourse pungency, that it be spoken pertinently to present wants and demands.

V. It is essential, also, that the speaker understand well the subject of his discourse. He who speaks of what he does not understand, speaks with no confidence in his own utterances, or with an unwarranted confidence ; and, in either case, his discourse will want the characteristics of true power. For assumed confidence always betrays itself, and to waver or faint in one's own judgment is to beget faintness, in those to whom that judgment is expressed. Distinct apprehensions, enlarged and comprehensive views of the extended and various bearings and connexions of things, and firm convictions of truth, are indispensable to strong feeling and strong modes of expression. Without such inward furniture for speaking, a man, in discourse, can be expected to exhibit nothing in just proportion and symmetry. The consequences are, that intelligent hearers are moved with commiseration, or contempt, or grief; and hearers of no class, receive vivid impressions of the exact truth. Knowledge does not always make a man powerful in speech, but ignorance makes him impotent.

VI. No one can speak with much force

who does not express what are strictly his own and not another's convictions. Where thoughts are borrowed, and held only in memory, however excellent they may be in themselves, as they are no legitimate part of the mind's own strength and life, they are apt to want something of nature, something of fitness and honesty, in the manner in which the mind gives them forth. A man with a memory capacious, and richly furnished with facts and other men's thoughts, may make a surprising display of knowledge, of some sort; but yet, he who tells the simple convictions and feelings of an intelligent and disciplined mind, without one quotation or learned allusion, is by far the more interesting, and efficient speaker.

Learning of all kinds should be diligently cultivated by the public speaker. No one has more need, or can make a better use of it; but his object in seeking it, should not be to supersede the necessity of judging and forming opinions, and pursuing deep and thorough investigations for himself, but rather to nourish his own intellectual life, and prepare his mind to be more and more vigorous and

enterprising, in self-sustained, independent action. Indeed, the mere accumulation of what others have said and thought, is not true learning, which properly consists in the perfect digestion and incorporation of the ideas of things into one's own intellectual structure; and the difference in expression, between the one and the other of these, is almost as the difference between an automatic and a natural articulation; or the draining of a pool by artificial means, and the spontaneous flow of a living fountain.

VII. It is essential to a powerful speech that its parts, however numerous, should belong to one subject, and constitute a complete whole. Digressions, and graceful intermissions of earnestness, designed for relief, or as a foil to what should have peculiar prominence, are not only admissible, but often a very high excellence. But whatever has a tendency to divide attention, should be avoided, and the more so if it be in itself attractive and powerful; it will be injurious to the discourse, in proportion to its intrinsic excellence.

VIII. This suggests another observation. A man who would speak with efficiency and



success, should intend to accomplish some definite and specific end by his discourse. He should have but one subject, and cleave to that subject throughout, and should also aim in every thing to accomplish a chosen object. He should never arise to address an assembly, without distinctly proposing to himself to make some particular impression upon them, and engaging all his powers of argument and persuasion in fulfilling that design. He can use no means so well suited to excite and concentrate mental energy, to produce unity and earnestness, to suggest topics and proofs, illustrations and images, thoughts that breathe and words that burn,—to make discourse, in short, natural and easy to himself, and interesting and powerful to his hearers.

This is admitted to be a good rule in application to speaking generally, but I am afraid it is too seldom followed by preachers of the gospel. Is not disregard of it the reason, that so little impression is commonly made by sermons? It is not strange that nothing is accomplished by discourse which aims to accomplish nothing.



I do not say that preaching is peculiarly censurable for indefiniteness of purpose, but I am sure that, of all discourse, it is the last that ought to be distinguished by this great defect.

IX. Natural and simple method is greatly tributary to power. Three points should be prominent in the speaker's aim; to say what ought to be said, to say nothing else, and to say every thing in its place. The best thoughts, spoken out of place, may escape attention, or be injurious; and the most common ones, spoken fitly and in place, may be of overpowering interest. All the parts of a speech should be so collocated and disposed, as to meet perfectly the demands of nature and propriety: one part should add strength to another; progress in speaking should be progress in strength; strength to the last should be cumulative, and the interest of the hearers should not only be sustained, but increasingly deepened quite to the end.

It is impossible to be too regardful of method. But by method is not to be understood a formal, and much less a numerical division into heads. Judgment and taste will discern

whether this be or be not expedient. Sometimes the brief and skilful enumeration of heads, besides assisting memory, is exceedingly lively and interesting; and sometimes the effect of enumeration is the perfection of weariness. A method so propounded as to draw attention to itself, and for its own sake, defeats its end, and is a general detriment to the discourse. Good speaking demands method, but it should be perfectly subservient to the main end pursued, and should never be made prominent on its own account.

X. Great attention is due to the style of a discourse, which is addressed to the public ear. The style fitting such a discourse is so different from that which becomes one intended for the press, that if it be given to the public through that medium, such important changes may be necessary as to require re-composition.

Style is not natural if it do not vary somewhat according to the nature of its subject, and is not marked with the speaker's individuality of mind. But with such variety there are certain attributes of style which always characterize powerful speaking. To speak with

power, for instance, is to speak with plainness, and such plainness as will express the meaning not only so that it may be understood, but so that it cannot be misunderstood; for what power is there in an utterance, the sense of which is uncertain to the hearer?—To plainness, must be added simplicity; because a meaning may be obvious, when yet it is so expressed as to have attention seduced from itself, to some vain word or ostentatious image in the sentence.—From plainness and simplicity, purity should not be disjoined; since, in speech, as in every thing else, true power has no dwelling with vulgarity; and since the end of all legitimate speaking is the elevation and refinement of man.—Further, the style of a powerful speaker is animated, as well as plain, simple and pure. There is life and spirit and pathos in his words; and he deals gracefully and naturally in allusions, analogies and images. The highest order of public speakers, those who keep the attention of auditories enchained, are men of rich invention, fertile imagination, and deep sympathies; whose style of speaking is strongly stamped with these attributes of

their minds.—Finally, boldness rather than caution, and energy rather than elegance, are appropriate qualities of the style of a strong speech ; it being the object of such a speech, not to please, but to persuade, not to give specimens of fine expression, but to impress some subject of great importance strongly on men's minds. It is an old and just remark, that, in respect of style, discourse which reaches the mind through the *ear*, is in some proportion to that which suits the close and protracted inspection of the *eye*, as the coarse painting of stage-scenery to the delicate coloring of a miniature.

XI. One of the most important of the elements of power in speaking, is just *action* ; or an external deportment in the speaker, becoming the subject of his thoughts, and the feelings which it should excite in his mind. Indeed, the greatest of ancient orators, placed in this, the first, second, and third perfection of a powerful speaker. The reasons of its importance are obvious. In the first place, the absence of it gives the hearers the impression that the speaker is not much moved himself ; for such is the sympathy between

the body and the mind, that the one cannot be deeply affected without producing a corresponding change in the other. If there is strong emotion within, it will appear in the face, in the tones of the voice, in the general air of the person; and little confidence is felt by the hearers in the sincerity of a speaker, whose *words* tell them that he is moved, when his *action* or manner of delivery gives no concurrent testimony.

Pleads he in earnest? Look upon his face;  
His eyes do drop no tears; his prayers are jest;  
His words come from his mouth.—

In the next place, when a powerful emotion becomes manifest by its effects upon the speaker's look and manner, it communicates itself to the audience, *independently* of words; so, as to make the most ordinary enunciation irresistible. If, before a man speaks his eyes glow with delight, or be suffused by silent grief, he is already eloquent. By a sort of contagiousness, emotion so manifested, diffuses itself with a power which no one can withstand. Hence, no remark more deserves the attention of a speaker than the

very common one, that the most ordinary matter uttered with just action will make a deep impression upon an audience, when the best speech ever composed, if delivered without this advantage, would be comparatively feeble.

XIII. The last specification relates to the connexion of personal holiness in the speaker, with power in his discourse. This connexion rests on two grounds. Such is the relation of truth to virtue, that an enemy to the latter is esteemed no friend of the former, and therefore insincere in its advocacy. And a discourse from such a man, however able in itself, will have but little good influence on the audience. No man, therefore, of an ill reputation ought to be a public speaker; or if he will speak, let it be for error, not for truth—"Unto the wicked, God saith, what hast thou to do, to declare my statutes? or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth?" Personal holiness, on the contrary, gives the advocate of truth great advantage, by the command, which he has by means of it, of the confidence and esteem of mankind. When a man qualified for speaking



in other respects, has a holy life and a good name, to sustain him in his challenges of public attention, he has an authority and a power, which, without these recommendations, the tongue of an angel would not exert. His pure character, his known love and practice of moral excellence, his bright example—point the sentences of truth which proceed from his lips, and fasten them in the minds of men.

But it is not only by having popular confidence and respect, that a speaker finds advantage from moral purity in himself; he is assisted by it, both in furnishing himself for his work, and in the actual discharge of it.—As truth is in order to virtue, so virtue is the best lover and the most exact discerner of truth. None, indeed, but a virtuous mind can well understand truth. Hence, moral evil, in Scripture, is everywhere called darkness, ignorance, folly, madness; and understanding, intelligence, wisdom, power, are identified with holiness. No scribe, therefore, is well instructed unto the kingdom of God, in whom the spirit of holiness, the only true spirit of illumination, does

not dwell. It is not the deep-searching and far-reaching processes of natural intellect, but spirituality of purpose, and heavenliness of feeling, which attain to just views of the beauty, excellency, and greatness of divine things. And the preacher who best understands his appropriate subjects of discourse, is he, who, while he applies all the energies of his being in the meditation of those subjects, keeps himself in the exercise of love to God, and is constantly praying in spirit, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

We have seen how important is manner in public speaking. But a just manner, especially in preaching, is not to be acquired from teachers of elocution, who, by all their rules of art, can give at best but a cold negative correctness. It is the deep workings of an inward life, that produce good action, the expression of those workings. These are the true parent of natural utterance and gesticulation. The preacher who comes into an assembly, with all the powers of his nature pervaded and filled by the theme on which he is to address them, and with pure love for their

souls, and under a sense of a present God who sustains his mind in holy composure by the influences of his Spirit, and lifts it up above the fear of man and all selfish aims and respects—he it is, supposing no deficiency in him in other things, who best exemplifies the principles of a just elocution, and gives the truest specimen of the eloquence of manner. But it is not a knowledge of rhetorical rules ; it is heavenliness of mind, and communion with God, and holy living, in addition to fit discipline and constitutional properties, which thus furnish him for powerful action in the pulpit. Those preachers who have exerted the highest kind of power, and in the highest degrees, were among the most virtuous, holy, and spiritual of mankind.

XIV. Such, I think, are the chief elements of power in speaking. They have seldom been all exemplified in the same individual. A man exemplifying them all in a high degree, becomes the wonder of the times, and holds a prominent place in the regard and the memory of the world. They were never perfectly exemplified except him of whom it is said, that “ never man never spake like that

man." He stands alone among all other public speakers, shining them out of view as the sun does the other lights of heaven. But though there may be good speaking in the absence of some of those things which have been enumerated as essential to the highest degree of power, and though no one may hope for absolute perfection in this great gift, more than in any other, yet as we ought to aspire to perfection in it, I thought it might be useful to give, as I have endeavored to do, as comprehensive and clear a view as these narrow limits admit, of the scale and standard of perfection in public speaking.

XV. It appears from these remarks, that the faculty of speaking in public is improvable by culture. I do not suppose that all men are capable of becoming, by any exertions, efficient speakers. Some appear to want the necessary physical elements; and improvement is impracticable where there is nothing to be improved. A distinction has been made, as to the way of their production, between an orator and a poet; the one, it has been said, is formed by art, the other is born; but the truth is, that both the orator and the

poet can attain to high eminence in their respective kinds of excellence, only by the concurrence of birth and art. No man becomes a powerful speaker by mere culture, independently of native advantages ; but where these advantages are not wanting, the influence of culture is decisive, and proportionate, ordinarily, to the degree in which it is bestowed.

To what particulars attention should be directed, it were venturous to state without specific reference to different cases and circumstances. But let any one consider the things which tend to power in speaking, and he will find that there is not one of them in which advancement may not be hoped for by the faithful use of appropriate means.

Indeed, not only may advantages be improved, but obstacles may be overcome. One of the most eloquent tongues that ever thrilled the ear of man, was that of a stammerer, who, besides his constitutional impediment, had to encounter the disadvantages of a very neglected and imperfect education. He contended against these great difficulties, and he contended with success. He rose by means

of his eloquence to the highest eminence of civil power, became the glory of his country and his age, and is, at this day, the admiration of the world.

XVI. It also follows, from the view which has been taken of our subject, that the business of a successful public speaker is one of great labor. Power in speaking, according to that view, is not the result of mere natural animation, or natural genius, however great. A genius for eloquence gives the greatest advantages, but it does not supersede the necessity of continued exertion. The business of choosing, adapting, and analyzing subjects of discourse; of arranging, composing, cementing, and applying discourse itself; and of so living, and so disciplining the heart, as to keep one's self in the necessary mood and tone of mind, for the just enunciation and delivery of discourse—this is work to be no otherwise done by any man, than by laborious and indefatigable application. And genius will prove hurtful, in proportion to the degree in which it is possessed, if in indolent reliance on itself, it neglects application, as needed only by persons of inferior gifts. Let



no one suppose that any thing will ever make it easy work to speak well in public. Occasions and circumstances may rouse the mind into high action, and the result may be surprising displays of eloquence, without much specific effort at preparation; but life is not made up of occasions of extraordinary excitement. Let all persons who design to be efficient and successful speakers in public, bid adieu to sensual indulgence, resist all temptations to mental sloth, and make a covenant with Labor, as their portion and pleasure under the sun.



#### IV.

### PREACHING SHOULD BE DOCTRINAL.

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#### PART FIRST.

IT was the same benevolent wisdom in which the entire scheme and method of our salvation originated, that made preaching the chief means of converting and sanctifying men. If God, having given the world a plain record of his will, had left each one dependent on his own private perusal of that record for all the advantage he was to derive from it, how slowly would the work of saving men have proceeded? All unlettered persons must have perished through ignorance; and the rest of mankind, with few exceptions, would have given the sacred writing too little attention, to gain even the most general knowledge of

its character. The fact is unquestionable, that what knowledge of the Scriptures actually exists among men, is almost exclusively the direct or indirect result of preaching. Had there been no preaching, where should we find readers of the word? A few might have procured a Bible as a curiosity, and a few by reading it might have become wise unto salvation, but the mass of men would scarcely have known of the existence of such a volume.—Faith cometh by hearing, not often by reading. It hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

We have heard the high decree, that it is by preaching that God will save men. It is needless to continue inquiry when the will of God is known. It is ours now not to speculate about the expediency of the measure, but to fall in with it, as we do with those other ordinances of God which appoint the means of our temporal well-being. To the question, how is the soul to be saved, the world to be converted, the compendious answer is—an answer from the mouth of God—by preaching. Those who believe that it is

God's purpose that the world be converted, and who would discharge their obligations in bringing about that result, will give heed to this divine announcement, and do what they can toward having the Gospel preached to every creature under heaven.

The assertion may strike some as bold, but only infidelity will question it, that of all the works going on among men, none is so important as that of preaching. If the blood of Christ is more precious than corruptible things, as silver and gold; if the soul is more valuable than the body; if the joys and sorrows of eternity are of more importance than those of a moment; then it is not unduly magnifying the office of preaching, to give it precedence above all earthly occupations.

It is desirable that a business on which so much depends should be well understood and well discharged. Perhaps no questions deserve more to be considered, at this day, than, *What is the best way of preaching; and, how are ministers to learn that way?* On what subjects is light more needed, or should it be more diligently sought?

The perfection of preaching comprehends

several things. It demands a peculiar style of discourse. It requires, in the preacher, a heart pervaded by very peculiar feelings—filled with unearthly sympathies and purposes. It needs a manner of utterance and elocution, deserving the greatest attention. Of the things now specified, proficiency in which let no one hope to attain without a special anointing of the Holy Spirit, I shall not treat; but shall only endeavor to illustrate a single topic, THE INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER OF SOUND, EVANGELICAL PREACHING.

I know not better how to express, by a single epithet, what I think the general strain of pulpit discourse should be, than by the term *doctrinal*;—a term which, as here used I am not willing to let pass unexplained.

Whoever has studied the character of the preaching most common throughout Christendom, must be aware, that what the people statedly hear from their ministers is, for the most part, the polished, uninformative, inefficient essay; or the affectionate, pointless exhortation; or the impassioned harangue; or



what is perhaps more ordinary than either, some common-place, desultory, extemporal address. I shall be understood as intending to disapprove of these kinds of discourse, by affirming that preaching should be doctrinal; but a full view of my meaning may not yet be taken.

For further explanation I remark, that there is a difference between things and the science or philosophy of things; and a man may be very familiar with the former, and know almost nothing of the latter. You may know music, so as to distinguish tunes and sound the notes in proper time and order, and yet know little of the laws of harmony, or the principles of musical combination. A man may know that the mixture of certain substances will be followed by certain remarkable changes in their respective properties, and yet not be a scientific chemist. Every one knows that the heavenly bodies are in motion, and perform regular revolutions; but it is comparatively a few who understand the laws of motion, and the causes of the phenomena of the heavens. In the department of language, thousands speak

their mother tongue who know little of its grammar, and less of the philosophy of language. Nor is it otherwise in the department of morals: mankind generally know what is good and bad in conduct; yet few have studied the laws of volition and action, and to the remoter springs and principles of moral agency, their thoughts have never attempted to penetrate. The instances of religious experience too, are known and exemplified by many who have very limited and ill-digested knowledge of those primary facts which are the foundations and objective causes of gracious affection; and there are many who float upon the surface of Christian doctrine, but have never dived far beneath it, and of those pure fountains whence the waters of the river of life are supplied, their knowledge is scant and defective.

Now that knowledge which these Christians want—the knowledge which they may acquire by penetrating beyond the mere surface of things in religion, in connexion with that knowledge of these things which they do possess—is what I mean by doctrinal knowledge; and that preaching which im-

parts such knowledge is, according to my understanding of the phrase, doctrinal preaching. Preaching, I mean, which searches out and reveals, the doctrine or reason of things, and hence I have used the term *doctrinal* as best suited to define it.

Doctrinal preaching, in this view, requires no distinction to be made in Christianity, between its *doctrines* and its *duties*; but defines a certain way of handling whatever is chosen as the theme of discourse, whether it be called doctrine, duty, or by any other name. Whether duty or doctrine, it may be treated in several ways; of the essay, or the harangue, or the extemporal common-place address; or in the doctrinal method. Though it be a doctrine, the discourse may be declamatory and loose; and though it be a duty, the discourse may be elaborately didactic and doctrinal, unfolding the principles and foundations of the subject in the most clear, coherent, and instructive manner.

Understanding the phrase as it has now been explained, I undertake to set forth the claims of doctrinal preaching, as that sort of

discourse which should be generally delivered from the pulpit.

I. The honor of the Gospel demands it. The prejudice against doctrinal preaching, so common amongst professed Christians, is too congenial, if I mistake not, with the spirit of infidelity. It appears to countenance the insidious scorner, who, behind a veil of seeming veneration for our religion, hides his unfriendly purpose; saying contemptuously, Christianity is too sacred to be reasoned about, and rests not upon reason, but faith, and is to be received, not understandingly, but implicitly; not upon conviction, but upon trust.\* No blasphemy should sooner awaken the Christian's indignant resistance. If the religion of Christ be not defensible by sober reasoning, it is not capable of being successfully defended. If it be not founded in reason, it is not founded in truth; and if not founded in truth, it is the greatest of impostures, and Christians are, of all men, the most

\* "Our most holy religion is founded on *faith*, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it, to put it to such a trial as it is by no means fitted to endure." *Hume's Essay on Miracles*.

to be pitied or despised. But if our religion be founded in truth and reason, then may it safely challenge rational investigation, and not fear the penetration and strength of the mightiest understanding. "God created understanding proportional to truth as the eye to the thing visible." Let truth then be luminously presented to the understanding, and they will be instantly joined to each other, and become as one. And so it proved in the experience of the first preachers. By manifestation of the truth, they commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Knowing they had nothing but truth precious as the honor of God and man's immortality, to declare, and that they were able to declare it justly, they were as free to speak before the princes of wisdom as before the untaught vulgar. They did not, indeed, always withdraw the wicked from their evil ways; but if they could hold dispassionate argument with them, they could gain their understanding, and so commend themselves to their conscience, and make judges and kings tremble in their presence. Christianity is the same now that it ever has been.

Amidst the endless diversities of opinion, the controversies and strifes, which prevail in the world, the substantial Gospel is still as pure as the skies whence it came ; nor is it less distinct, or less intelligible, than it was at first. If it could be understood then, it can be understood now : if it could be defended then, it can be defended now : and if it was then omnipotent over the mind of man, it is so at present. Let preachers be just in their statements and reasonings in respect to it, and they have nothing to fear from the understanding and wit of man.

There are things in Christianity, as there also are in nature, above human reason, and which reason itself would never have discovered ; but that does not empower human reason to discard those things, unless a mere sparkle of intellect has become transcendent above the great Source of Wisdom whence it sprang.

It is the greatest indignity to our divine religion, for its preachers and disciples to decry reason as unfriendly to it, or to discourse of it in a way which implies that its affinity with reason is not perfect. Its worst enemies



could do it no greater wrong. What should we more desire than that a religion which is the perfection of reason, should be subjected to its severest tests? We have only to ask of an adversary, that he open the eyes and ears of his understanding. No ill consequence should be apprehended. If the spirit of sect, or some cunning deceiver hath associated with the gospel dogmas which are not true, these dogmas would be detected and condemned, but every word of the Gospel would be found to be pure, as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times.

II. The intellectual being which God has given us cannot be suited with preaching which is not doctrinal. The rational nature of man inclines him, even in infancy, to inquire after the causes and principles of things; and who has not felt a spring of genuine delight in his breast, when, after patient attention, he has learnt the rationale, of any matter? The natural inquisitiveness of man for causes and theories, shows itself in nothing more than in religion; and when we are preaching, great managing will be necessary to keep down

altogether this propensity among the people. Unless superstition, and the delusion that we are infallible, reign over the congregation with absolute power, we shall hardly be able to hinder some minds from feeling unsatisfied for want of proofs, or contemptuous at our efforts to keep difficulties out of view. It were worthier of the great cause which we advocate, to be fearless of the utmost exposure, and place our subjects high in view of all observers, and by manly argumentation, repel whatever would tend to obscure the evidence of their truth. This is the way, too, to meet the demands of that rational being which, as really as the gospel, God has given to man, and the laws of which we cannot with impunity violate.

It must be confessed, that the state of the human understanding, so greatly subjected as it is to the sway of sloth and sensuality, is such that doctrinal discourse, greatly elaborated, would not, in most places, be very interesting and popular, especially at first. But it is the design of the gospel to free the understanding of man from the servitude and stupidity into which sin has cast it: and it

is well suited to answer that purpose: and if justice be done to it in its presentations from the pulpit, that purpose will be answered; the human understanding will respond to the appeals of the gospel; the law of Christ and the law of mind will be found to harmonize with each other; intellectual energy will be awakened; intellectual pleasure will be felt; and doctrinal preaching, having accomplished so much, must now go on to perfection, or the popular understanding may go before the preacher, become unsatisfied, and begin to pine because its wants are not supplied.

III. This suggests another remark. No other kind of discourse than that which we recommend, truly instructs and edifies mankind. As the body is nourished only by the due reception of appropriate food, so the growth of the mind, in knowledge and strength, demands sound instruction. But discourse is instructive, whatever be its subject, only so far as it is doctrinal; that is, as it explains and elucidates the principles and theory of things. What instruction would he give concerning astronomy, who should

only recount the number of the planets and constellations, and tell you of the phenomena which relate to them. You would learn some facts, but you must know their meaning, in other words, their causes and connexions, before you could justly be said to be instructed. Instruction, if I may so speak, is the knowledge of science, not the knowledge of mere facts and events. In the moral, as well as in the physical world, this holds equally true. He who speaks to you of moral conduct or experience, but does not refer it to its true principles, its objective causes, tells you what all men know, and approve or disapprove; but he does not instruct you. If a man should preach to you your lifetime, in the commonplace strain of the essay or exhortation, he would add little to your substantial edification. What energy would he infuse into your mind; what spring, what enlargement, what aspiring of thought and affection would he produce?—An instructive lecturer in physics skillfully unfolds the principles and connexions of things; and this is the true definition of an instructive preacher: He will be constantly occupied in searching for the founda-

tions of truth, and these he will expose in his discourses ; and if he does this, his preaching will be of the kind which I denominate doctrinal.

If then the end of preaching involves, in any measure, the instruction of the human mind, ministers must addict themselves to doctrinal expositions ; and with Paul *reason* as well as persuade and exhort.

IV. It is only by doctrinal discourse that error can be confuted. It is not to be forgotten, that all the multifarious forms of error stand marshalled against that gospel which ministers are set to defend. When we come to the people with the testimony of God, we do not find them, either entirely ignorant of our message, or entirely indifferent in respect of it. To a great extent, their minds are crowded with old opinions, the offspring of selfishness, nursed by custom and tradition. Many false prophets also have gone out into the world ; and every heresy has its shrewd and subtle advocates ; and though sound doctrine be for the most part unwelcome to the multitude, their ears are eager for heretical novelties. Now pleasant, smooth essays of

morality, or a continued round of common-place exhortation, or any loose, customary strain whatever, will have no avail in favor of the gospel against such adversaries.—It is not pertinent to reply that nothing will be available but the influence of the Spirit; for the Spirit uses means in promoting truth; and he does not use means which are unsuitable, but such as are adapted to the end, and have a tendency to accomplish it; and what tendency, I ask, is there in common-place preaching to subvert the strongholds of error? Error is supported by doctrinal discourse. Heretics and gainsayers are high pretenders to penetration; and are ever theorizing, and making a show of reasons, and philosophy, and logic; and should Christ's ministers think that easy exhortations and essays will prevail against that mode of assailing the truth? No; the aberrations of a false philosophy can be, in no other way corrected, than by the inculcation of the true. 'The ordinary result of the process of abstraction and system-making is the propagation among the people of settled principles of belief and thought; and these principles, true or false, are never inoperative;



and if false, they are fruitful of evil, beyond the reach of imagination; a thousand instances of actual crime being often as nothing, compared to the prevalence of one false opinion. These principles are not to be resisted by rhapsodical preaching. They must be patiently searched out, and solidly confuted, and meekly displaced by the establishment of true positions and principles in their stead.

Such is the task to which preachers of the word should address themselves. Personal debate with the ministers of unrighteousness they should not hold; but skill to detect fallacies, ability to manifest the foundations of truth amidst the perplexities and ambiguities of false reasoning, they are bound to exercise; and to learning and penetration on the side of error, must they oppose sounder learning and deeper penetration on the side of truth.

V. If ministers do not addict themselves to doctrinal preaching, their discourses must soon become stale, and the intellectual character of their ministry weak and contemptible. Superficial discourse on experience may

please for once, twice, or thrice ; but it becomes insipid by frequent repetition : and superficial discourse on morality, or faith, may charm for a little season by the beauty of its sentences, and the pleasant voice and gesture with which it is pronounced. But smooth composition will not long supply the lack of patient thought ; nor will the constant pressure of the pulpit's demands consist with great efforts at fine and tasteful periods. If men have not acquired the habit of patient and protracted thinking, they will become but dull preachers in the course of a few years. But forbid us to be doctrinal in the common strain of our preaching, and what encouragement should we have to exert our minds in the work of the ministry ? What should we employ our thought about ? To dole out common-places, saying little or nothing from the beginning to the end of the year, except what was said the year before, and what the people have known, since they knew their catechisms and primers, requires no exertion of intellect ; nor can the minister be much less leisurely and spiritless in making, than the people in hearing such discourse. In-

deed, no man is condemned to a more undesirable drudgery, than he who is obliged to make several public discourses a week, and yet restrained from what I understand by doctrinal investigation. It were better to be doomed to the anvil or the mine, than to such travail. In such circumstances is it probable that the mind will grow? No more than that the body would thrive in a dungeon and loaded with chains. It will wither away into pitiable decrepitude. Of this, there have been too many sad verifications. Men there have been in the ministry, (may there be no more such,) who, at their introduction, gave promise of eminence; but, yielding to popular prejudice, or to indolence of mind, they discontinued serious thought; persuading themselves that desultory performances would suffice for the plain people; and by what leanness and infirmity were their after ministrations marked!

This ought not so to be. It is incumbent upon ministers to improve in preaching—to let their profiting, in this business, appear unto all; and Scripture tells them how this is to be done. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee”—

“Meditate upon these things”—“Give thyself wholly to them”—“Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine”—“Continue in them”—counsel which supposes that the character of preaching is such as I am commending ;—that it should employ and exhaust all the high powers of beings made in the image of God, and who are to be workers together with God. Let preachers be restrained from doctrinal investigations, and the most perfect use of their intellect in preaching, and whom would they resemble less, or serve less, than their Maker ; or who can but foresee that not their profiting, but their declining will ensue ?

VI. But we have a stronger reason for resisting the prevailing prejudice against doctrinal preaching. It is, that no other kind of preaching is likely to be attended permanently by much evangelical fruit. This remark would, in some places, be deemed more than questionable, but the evidence of its truth overweighs every thing which can be alleged against it.

In the first place, it is only doctrinal preaching that will keep attention awake. The excitement produced by essays, rhaps-

sodies, and declamations, is always transient; the means having in themselves no tendency to perpetuate it. It cannot but be vain to attempt, by such means, to meet the deep exigences of intellectual natures,—to ask them to be satisfied with nothing better than the song of one who has a pleasant voice, while they are capable of the blessedness of knowing even as they are known. Facts invariably confirm this remark. In no congregation, which does not hear doctrinal discourses, does a lively attention to religion permanently exist. But no preaching is of avail if the people are indifferent to it; and nothing can keep them attentive which does not give exercise to their thoughts and instruct their understandings.

Again—Of all gracious affection and action, sound doctrine is the objective cause. By the laws of mind, moral feeling cannot exist without an object in the mind's view to which it corresponds. It is impossible for a man to act or feel intelligently, without something in his thoughts. All men understand this; and hence it is unknown for one to undertake to actuate the mind of his fel-

low, in any other way than by presenting considerations adapted to produce the desired result. No one tries to convince a person without urging reasons; or to alarm him without stating causes of alarm; or to please him without specifying grounds of pleasure. In religion, no more than in any other department of intelligent agency, is it by rant, or authoritative denunciations and demands, or any such like uninstructional methods, that the powers and affections of the human mind can be wrought into just emotion. Vainly then are ministers occupied, in endeavoring to affect their hearers truly and graciously, by any other than doctrinal discourse. The impression to be produced being the counterpart of some doctrine; they might as well think to see without a visible object, or to produce an effect without its appropriate cause, as to expect the impression without inculcating the doctrine.

I do not forget that nothing can be done effectually without the aid of the Holy Spirit; that even Paul's preaching would have been without success, had it been unattended by a special influence from on high: I



have advanced nothing inconsistent with this grand truth, unless the mode of the Spirit's agency be inconsistent with the laws of the human mind and the nature of things. But what care does Scripture use to teach us that such is not the way of the Holy Spirit's working—that men are begotten again by the word of truth; are freed from sin, and sanctified through the knowledge of the same word, which, therefore, is called most appropriately, the Sword of the Spirit. It is by bringing the soul and the gospel into fair contact and conjunction, that the Spirit achieves the renovation of the soul. The soul he disengages from the chains which bind it down to sense, by making the truth manifest before her intellectual eye; and the impressions made upon her are the exact counterparts of doctrines adapted to produce them: whence the Apostle's manner of describing the result of the Spirit's agency:—"Ye have obeyed from the heart, that form of doctrine into which ye were delivered."

Let the appeal now be made to observation. True experimental and practical religion are according to facts, the attendants,

not of the declamatory or essay strain of preaching; but of that which discerns the foundations and rightly divides the word of truth, to the people. Wherever the gospel hath free and glorious course, and the lives of men abound with its fruits, and "holiness to the Lord" marks, in any good measure, their civil, literary, and other institutions, there the ministers of Christ are scribes well instructed unto the kingdom of God, and the doctrinal way of preaching stands in high esteem. No land, is more eminent than New England for purity of morals and zeal for the gospel; no land is more indebted for its moral character, to the influence of preaching; and New England has always been distinguished for preachers given to a doctrinal, sometimes, metaphysical sort of discourse. On the other hand, where this way of preaching is disrelished, and the other kinds are encouraged, the sphere of practical religion is limited; its standard low; and the things which remain are almost ready to die.

VII. We have, finally, still greater witness to the excellency of this mode of preaching.

THE BIBLE IS IN FAVOR OF IT. The Bible favors it by its own example. Its announcements, indeed, coming directly from the mouth of God, come as oracles, having inherent proofs of infallibility, and so demanding prompt entrance into every mind. But even the Bible, that divine preacher, the very voice of God speaking in human ears, recognizing man as a rational creature, condescends to explain to him the reasonableness of its revelations. Where, throughout the inspired volume, does God discover an unwillingness to have his word subjected to the tests of reason? Does he not expressly call us to try it by reason; telling us to judge what he says; wishing us to show ourselves wise; asking us whether his ways be not equal, his statutes right, his doctrines true; and blaming us for nothing more than our indiscrimination and reluctance in searching into his communications? What deep argumentations did Christ hold with the Jews, whether pharisees, sadducees, lawyers, elders, or priests; and how, by unanswerable argument, and in this way exclusively, did he always prevail. How admirably did Pe-

ter reason on the day of Pentecost, and Stephen before his martyrdom, and Paul in his discourses to Felix and Agrippa and the philosophers of Athens. It was not left to a Paley to prove the being and perfections of God, on the principle, that design infers a designer. Paul, on Mars Hill, availing himself of no apostolical prerogative, proceeded, on that principle of natural theology, while thus he reasoned with his dignified auditory, "Forasmuch as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." And the world cannot produce specimens of sounder or deeper reasoning than we find in the epistle of this last-named Apostle, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, and Hebrews. We have in these divine writings, something very different from essays on morality, and loose exhortations and rhapsodies of experience. We have not that formal statement and division of subjects, which uninspired books contain ; but such examples of clear, coherent, convincing argumentation,

cannot be produced out of all the volumes in the world.

Thus it is that the Bible preaches. If ministers would adopt the best and safest model, they surely know where to find it; and if as private Christians we should conform ourselves to the spotless pattern of our Saviour's piety; so, since Divinity has also exercised the office of preaching, should we, as preachers, aim at as close a correspondence as possible to that unerring specimen.

But ministers are taught to be doctrinal in their strain of preaching, not only by the example, but by several positive precepts of inspiration—"A bishop, says Paul, must be apt to teach—must use sound speech which cannot be condemned;—in short, must study to approve himself unto God, a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Without comment, I leave all men to judge whether any one can answer to this description of an evangelical minister, without addicting himself to the doctrinal way of preaching.





## V.

### PREACHING SHOULD BE DOCTRINAL.

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#### PART SECOND.

THE foregoing reasons are, I think, sufficient to the end for which they have been urged, and should prevail against all objections: yet I am aware that strong objections are supposed to exist; and as I would leave no vestige of support to the hurtful prejudice against doctrinal preaching, I beg attention to a brief examination of these objections.

I. Some deem this way of preaching objectionable, as favoring an exercise of reason, which implies its superiority to religion, and its having authority, to judge, disown, and reject it. But if religion be true, and be attended with adequate evidences of its truth,

the human mind, in the exercise of reason, must fall before it, and yield to it the unre-served subjection of its energies. Reason is needful to the reception of truth, must be employed in order to its reception, and cannot but receive it, if employed aright, and its attendant proofs be sufficient. To restrain the exercise of reason out of deference to religion, is to keep man and religion for ever asunder. Let any one try to conceive how religion is to exert any influence upon man, without making its appeals to his reason, and he will at once discover the absurdity of the attempt. In making these appeals, religion seems to submit itself to reason ; but it is, in truth, the most gracious of all miracles—infinite intelligence, stooping to recover a ruined creature, in the only way in which it can be done, to receive, in return, that creature's adoring self-devotement and praise.

Some not willing to be classed among those who would invest religion with compulsory power, and not willing also to trust it wholly to itself—to its own sun-bright, self-evidencing effulgence, to establish its free and peaceful empire among men—have allowed

reason to converse with it within certain limits and under certain restraints. Reason's province, say they, is to satisfy itself, first, as to the testimonials of the divine origin of the gospel ; and then to submit, implicitly, to its decisions, without allowing reason any further control or liberty.

But we must not assume that the decisions of a divine revelation may contradict those of right reason, and still be bound to submit to the former and reject the latter. This most plainly, were to dishonor God, and hopelessly to expose his cause to the assaults of infidelity. No ; the decisions of right reason, and of the God of reason, must be coincident ; and if contradiction does result in our rational processes, we have perverted reason, either, in endeavoring to ascertain the import of revelation ; or, in the judgment we have formed of the truth of that import. Here then we see, not that reason should be abjured, but that it should perform its office more faithfully. It must retrace its steps, and discover, and correct its mistakes.

The jealousy then of those who to honor revelation would degrade the office of reason, re-

sults from mistaking the perversions of reason for its legitimate use. It may be an ingenuous but it is a preposterous jealousy. Revelation can no more dispense with reason, after its genuineness has been ascertained, than before. Reason cannot be dispensed with at all; revelation without it, were of none effect. The human mind is never, and cannot be, passive, in the reception of truth. It must exercise itself; reason must be active, and must be convinced; truth must commend itself, through the understanding, to the conscience, before it can win the consent and love of the heart. A man may know that the Bible is a divine book, and suppose that he has ascertained its import; but if he sees in that import, a clear contradiction of right reason,—something must be done,—it can have no lodgement in his mind, as a principle of life and practice.

Truth may, indeed, relate to subjects beyond the comprehension of the human mind: of such high subjects reason is not competent to judge: but though the subjects may not be fully understood, the truth relating to them, as far as it is knowable, may be expressed in

intelligible propositions ; and must be so expressed, and being so expressed must be considered in the exercise of reason, and to the mind's eye must appear to be true, before they can enter and influence the heart.

It is not said that mere authority should never have influence on the mind's decisions concerning the character of the propositions which are submitted to its attention. It may be proof of great weakness to disregard authority. There is no reason, as well as no humility, in disbelieving the assertions of men of superior intelligence and virtue, on subjects on which no independent information is attainable. It should not be forgotten that man at his best estate is fallible ; but it is folly to hold the contrary of a proposition which is supported by good authority, when for that contrary itself there is no evidence whatever. Where God is the testifier, it is the repudiation of reason to remain in doubt as to the truth of his assertions ; nor is it otherwise, to think that it cannot consist with his goodness and wisdom to make assertions on some subjects which are above human comprehension. A teachable mind is deferential

to the word of unlettered honesty, on points involving no absurdity in themselves, and about which it has no other means of knowledge. Nevertheless, in regard to cases of authority, reason is as perfectly concerned as in other cases. Whatever the mind embraces, it does so in the exercise of reason. By reason, it apprehends the meaning of the propositions relating to the subjects in question: By reason it discerns the character of the authority on which the credibility of the propositions rests: and it is reason that does not suffer those propositions to be discarded as false which such authority affirms to be true. In respect to the subjects to which the propositions relate, as nothing is known beyond what the propositions contain, so nothing beyond this is either assented to or denied, or in any way taken cognizance of, by the mind. So that all the mind does, in cases of authority, it does exclusively in the exercise of reason. To require the non-exercise of reason at any stage, is to demand that the mind there cease its action, and embrace nothing.

It is the pretension of some who have de-



voted themselves almost exclusively to the business of interpreting Scripture, that their's is the province of certainty and safety, intending an indirect stroke upon the philosophical systematizing theologian. But do these interpreters suppose, that after they have shown the true sense of the text, they have finished the work of reasoning, and that the divine, or the preacher, has only to take up the result of their exegetical labor, and retail it out to the people without further elucidation or argument? The preacher will not do his duty if he does not reason about it still; and summon up all the powers of his hearers, also, to its investigation, and to an intelligent decision on its claims to their practical regard. The mere announcement, indeed, of the unquestioned meaning of the Bible to him who admits the divinity of that book, is decisive. Even as to him, however, it may be not only useful, but indispensable to its practical results, to prove it, independently of its divine authority; for where the evidence of truth is multiplied, the probability of its reception is increased. But it is of no avail to an infidel, that an announcement is

scriptural, while he denies that Scripture is divine. With such a man, we must reason either on the grounds of external evidence, and so overcome his disbelief, or accomplish the same end, by convincing him of the truth of Scripture, independently of divine testimony. The latter ordinarily is the readiest mode; since men disown the Bible, not because they can invalidate the external proofs of its divinity; but because they deny, or doubt, the truth of the things contained in it. In respect to the mass of human minds, this seems to be the only available mode; the historical argument for revelation being too long for their patience, or too deep for their comprehension. They must be convinced, if convinced at all, mainly by the clear and indubitable perception of the truths of scripture, as *truths*—truths which the wisdom of the world did not discover, on which man's high destiny as a being made in the image of God depends, and contained originally, in no book but that which claims the authority of his Maker; who, we may well suppose, would not have failed herein, to provide suitably for his de-

pendant and helpless creatures. And it is, in fact, this perception of the intrinsic truth of Scripture-statements, along with their known momentous bearing on the great end of our being, the undeniable futility of the highest human effort to discover them after an experiment of four thousand years, and the acknowledged character of God and his relations to his creatures—which convinces mankind, for the most part, that their Creator has given them these sure counsels of his wisdom and his love. Who then is to say, where the process of reasoning, in respect to the ascertained import of Scripture, shall be arrested?

Besides, do not these interpreters forget to what extent they themselves employ reason in doing their appropriate work? They cannot prosecute, they cannot commence their philological examinations, without the intermeddling of philosophy, the primordial philosophy, at least, of common sense. They always give us results, to which philosophy, quite as much as philology, assisted them in arriving. It must be so from the nature of the case. Words are the signs of things. Words are

of no significance when the things are unknown. An interpreter then can accomplish nothing by attempting to explain words without the aid of philosophy, or to a mind in utter ignorance of things. How, for example, could he, by any explanation of terms descriptive of colors, convey the idea of color to a man born blind? It is absurd then, for philology to declare war against philosophy.

We see the stamp of philosophy on the very first principles and maxims of philology. That figurative language is not to be construed literally, but according to the known nature of the thing to which it relates; that language concerning a subject above the reach of human reason should be so understood, as not to involve an impossibility or absurdity; that no scripture is rightly explained, when an absurdity is drawn out of it,—these are fundamental principles of interpretation, for which philology is indebted not to itself, nor to Scripture, but to that common sense which belongs to rational beings, as such, and which is the essence and strength of true philosophy. Philology cannot proceed a step, independently of reason.

And now, if truth taken out of Scripture be not safe in the hands of a reasoning Theologue, is Scripture itself safe in the hands of a reasoning Interpreter ? It is truly debatable, which is the greater reasoner of the two. But if it were not, the less surely would have no cause to glory over the greater. There is no sin, and no danger in rightly employing our rational powers, either in the interpretation of Scripture, or in the inculcation of Scripture truth, when ascertained. Reason should have free course through the whole empire of religion ; length, breadth, depth, and height : it should not be hindered, but expedited ; we should wish to give it wings ; we should wish it to be as swift and as free in its movements, as the heart ought to be in loving God, and the feet in running the way of his commandments. It is not the exercise of reason which is to be guarded against, but those perversions of reason which spring from pride, the spirit of sect, preconceived opinions, and depraved inclinations and habits. These are what we should resist. To resist the exercise of reason because of its liability to perversion, is to hin-

der the progress of religion itself; and to decide that it is better there should be no religion on the earth, than to use the necessary means of its promotion, from which, through human depravity, incidental evil may arise.

The course of religion in this world is necessarily adventurous. The only means by which it can be advanced are such as may be abused. But since it is on the whole best that the cause of God and religion be not abandoned, the necessary means of maintaining it, the free exercise of reason, must be employed, notwithstanding the incidental evils which may thence arise. The object of jealous vigilance and meek resistance, should be those evils; but if by our utmost care they cannot be entirely precluded, let not our resentment be inflamed against reason; but by earnest prayer, patient labor, and the exercise of a resigned, self-denied spirit, let us wait upon God, to bring good out of evil, and make the wrath of man praise him.

2. The view which we have taken of the work of the sacred office may appear to some objectionable, as demanding such high qualifications in preachers, that this class of men



must always be much too small to meet the necessities of a perishing world. But these qualifications are identically those which the nature of the work to be done, and Scripture, obviously require. And a smaller number of preachers of the right order may be more useful, on the whole, than a larger number with incompetent abilities. It is matter of Church-History, that of ministers, one has, not seldom, been worth a hundred or a thousand.—Besides, it is censure, not of our views on this subject, but of the arrangement of God, to allege that he has required work to be done when a sufficient number of workmen competent to the task cannot be procured. Before an objection of this kind is raised, trial should be made. Has the Church enlisted her utmost strength, and while prudently and patiently employing it for the attainment of the end, raised the cry night and day to the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into the harvest?

It may be that the just impression is not taken as to the nature of the requisite talents for preaching. It should be inferred from what I have said, that a preacher should

be a sound-minded man, and should know how to use his faculties in the inculcation and defence of the gospel; and is this an untenable principle? A higher standard than this we have not raised, a higher is not needed; and this is not so high, but that the Church should refuse to acknowledge any man as a regular preacher who falls much below it. Preachers of this description, confiding in the grace of God, and anointed by his Spirit, may go fearlessly to their work. Let them take heed that what they undertake to defend, is the simple gospel, and give themselves wholly to their work, and they will find the business of preaching to prosper in their hands. The task of difficulty is to sustain the cause of error, or of truth adulterated and obscured by the intermixture of error. Simple truth, divested of the clothing and encumbrances of false philosophy, and plainly presented to the mind, wins its own way, carrying its best evidence in its own bright essence, and having countenance and confirmation from all nature. He who sets forth nothing but genuine, unadulterated truth, in his preaching, will find almost all

things freely offering to assist his honest and hearty endeavors to illustrate and enforce it. Arguments will be plenteous; and besides arguments, similitudes and analogies will spontaneously present themselves, to give it a charm and a grace by which the minds of men will be at once convinced and delighted. The first and grand concern of preachers is to be sure that what they undertake to discourse about, is genuine gospel; and in order to get this assurance, not gigantic strength of intellect, so much as a delicate simplicity of spirit, like the simple life of a new-born babe, is the best prerequisite. Now, this is a quality which no christian should want, and in which preachers surely should excel.

Let preachers be sound and simple-minded men, and acquire a just and skilful use of their powers; and then if they will give themselves up wholly and absolutely to their business, they may go forth into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, and, with the Apostle, raise the triumphant demand, *where is the wise, where is the scribe, where is the disputer of this world?*

3. It is objected that the essential articles of Christian doctrine are plain and few, and that since these are sufficient for salvation, the work of the ministry need not be so arduous; at least there is no necessity for laying such a burden on ministers, as our laborious way of preaching requires them to bear. But what though we should grant that the chief topics of preaching are few? Since the business of preaching must be all the while going on, the discourses on those topics must be many; and they should always be instructive and edifying; and to diminish subjects of discourse, when discourse itself is not abated, is the way not to lessen but to augment labor. Besides, it does not follow that because the fundamentals of Christianity are few, ministers need not extend their researches beyond those few fundamentals. Christians should not always be confined to the alphabet of their religion. They are required to grow in grace, but how can they grow in grace without growing in knowledge? Affection must needs stagnate and decrease if thought be not exercised, and the sphere of intellectual light enlarged. And if Chris-

tians should have no concern to know any thing of the gospel beyond what the dying thief understood, why has the entire volume of inspiration been put into their hands with an injunction to be always searching into it? And why are they urged to leave the *principles* of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection? And why were some so pun- gently reprehended by the Apostle, because, when for the time they ought to have been teachers, they had need to be still taught which were the first principles of the oracles of God, and were become such as had need of milk, and not of strong meat; being no more than babes in grace, after so long a season of rich privilege? But if it is the duty of Christians to advance in divine knowledge, it surely is not permitted to ministers to be going backward, or standing still, in their preaching. They should gladly take the lead of their people, and conduct them through the whole field of inspired wisdom, and leave nothing unexplored, of all that God has brought to the view of mortals by the gracious communications of his Spirit.

4. It is often objected that doctrinal dis-

cussions want the animation and warmth which should always pervade speeches spoken to the public. It is not denied that they may and sometimes do want these important qualities : but my first answer is, Better are discussions without these qualities than common-place discourse which gives no instruction, and neither asks nor awakes attention. —I answer again, that discussions are often pronounced inanimate, not because they are really so, but because the low spiritual state of the people disinclines them to such sober discourse. A congregation who have been trained by doctrinal preaching to think, and search into the depths of divine things, will take the liveliest pleasure in discussions, which, to others not so trained, would be almost insupportably tedious. Thirdly, I answer, that if doctrinal discussions are arid and cold, this commonly arises not from necessity, or the nature of such discourse, but from some fault in the preacher. A man may be animated in argument as well as exhortation. There is eloquence in thought as well as eloquence in manner, and the former is the nobler sort of eloquence. But the doctrinal



preacher should not disdain the eloquence of manner. He, as much as any other man, may seek out the most acceptable words, and throw his thoughts into an orderly method, and dress them in the richest beauties of imagination, and pronounce them with all the graces and power of the most perfect elocution. Say not that ~~these~~ things misbecome the simplicity of the Evangelical preacher, since the Bible itself delivers the sacred truths of inspiration with an eloquence of manner which throws into shade the best profane specimens in the world. Paul does indeed discard *the enticing words of man's wisdom* ; but let his own discourses before Agrippa and the Athenian Areopagites, and his farewell to the Ephesian Elders, and his descant upon the resurrection—let these matchless pieces show, that by the enticing words of man's wisdom Paul did not mean eloquent, powerful, and well-ordered discourse.—Indeed, such are the themes of the gospel, that distinct and vivid thought concerning them cannot but prompt to eloquent utterance. No subjects are so adapted to excite a speaker's spirit—to rouse from

their lowest depths all the energies and passions of his being—to task to the uttermost all his resources of expression—in a word, to inbreed within him all the elements and the ethereal life of eloquence. Who could be cold while speaking, with just intellection, of “the transformation of apostate man from earthly to divine;” of the sacrifice of the Son of God; or of the love in the Father and the Son, which that sacrifice discovered; or of the resurrection of the dead; or of the great day of judgment; or of the woes and the glories of eternity? To discourse on such subjects tamely, is proof of any thing rather than lucid perceptions and enlarged views.

5. It is objected to doctrinal preaching, that it disturbs and perplexes its hearers, and thus hinders their improvement. To which I reply: If the perplexity complained of be produced by good doctrinal preaching, it is but an ill omen of the spiritual state of the complainers. If people are made sorry by clear and lively exhibitions of divine truth, they have too much cause for sorrow; and if they can obtain comfort only by turning their

eyes away from such exhibitions, their comfort is little worth, and of short continuance. They carry the elements of misery in their own breasts, and these elements will not be kept from kindling into a flame, though they should never open their ears to the words of sound instruction.

But for a further answer, I would suggest whether those who have these difficulties may not owe their trouble, in some degree, to their not having been used to hear good doctrinal preaching. As the bodily frame could not endure strong meat, if it had hitherto received no other food than milk, so if the food given to the spiritual man be always mere elementary truths, not unmixed perhaps with traditionary errors, it is not surprising that he cannot comfortably digest the more heavenly principles of Christian doctrine.

But whatever be the cause of perplexity, it is clear that if the preaching be right, the perplexity is not groundless ; and the ground of it should, if possible, be removed. But there is no hope of removing it while the doctrine, which alone can discover it, is kept out of view.

6. It is finally much objected to this kind of preaching, that it occasions doubtful disputations and strifes of words. I do not deny that there is a strain of preaching, called doctrinal, which has a tendency to produce these disagreeable results; but they are not the legitimate results of sound doctrinal discourse, which has no affinity with the spirit of strife, and is as charitable and mild as it is pointed and discriminating. Men of perverse minds would indeed murmur and dispute, under the best possible mode of setting forth the truth; but neither the truth, nor its advocates, should bear the blame of their perverseness. The tendency of that preaching which exhibits sound doctrine clearly and vividly, instead of favoring angry disputation among men, promotes their happy establishment in the truth. I appeal to observation to confirm this remark. The full manifestation of truth has ever been God's chosen way to convince, liberate, and unite the minds of men. This was the Apostolic way. It was the way adopted by Luther and his coadjutors in reformation. It was the way of Edwards, and of the most successful minis-

ters of more modern days. There were many to gainsay and contend; but there were heretics and disputers in the time of the great Apostle; and if they did not prevent him from preaching in a strain eminently doctrinal, neither should they be deemed a sufficient reason against pursuing such a course now.

I know not that there remains any other considerable objection to that kind of discourse, which, I think, all ministers of the gospel should address to mankind from the pulpit, and have only to make two or three concluding remarks.

*Preachers should be wholly engrossed in their work.* No man that warreth, much more, no man who acquits himself well as a preacher of the gospel, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life. If any work ever demanded the whole of one's mind, it is that of a stated preacher of God's word. Of all employments it is the last, in which success may be hoped for by desultory self-indulgent habits. At the same time there is none, success in which is so important. All the great things of earth, compared with what

depends on the manner in which preaching is performed, are deserving of no mention or thought. Kingdoms rise and fall, worlds pass away, but human minds hold on their eternal course, and whether it shall be endlessly continued in woe or bliss, may be depending more than all things else, upon the character of the preaching which they hear from Sabbath to Sabbath. — What manner of men should preachers of the Gospel be? Should they have to do with anything which might hinder their profiting in the great business of their calling? Should they not study and meditate and pray, and use every fit means for keeping their hearts and minds in the holiest frame, that their preaching may be such as God will delight to bless, and souls be saved in hearing? Except when, like Paul, they must work with their own hands or want their necessary food, can they be justified in giving themselves to any thing but prayer and the ministry of the word? The work of a minister is honorable and delightful, but it is also laborious and important enough to absorb the time and strength of an angel. Let no man hope



ever to preach well, without great pains both in meditation and prayer.

*No one will rush hastily upon the work of the ministry who has just views of its nature.* There are two inducements to a premature commencement; desire to enter into domestic relations, and impatience to be engaged in winning souls. To name the first is to pronounce its reprobation; the second should be more tenderly considered, but cannot be approved. There are methods of winning souls which may be employed by converts a day old; but he who enters upon the business of a regular preacher of the word, should consider the nature of that business, and his fitness for it; and should also inquire, whether the Lord has called him to it: for it is not mere concern that men be saved, but ability and faithfulness in preaching, and the divine blessing, which will make him actually instrumental in saving them. "Am I, both as to talents and grace, prepared in some good measure for this great work? and will God be with me in performing it?" are questions which it becomes him to ponder well who thinks to be a preacher

of the everlasting Gospel. Preachers are greatly needed: only a small part of mankind have ever heard the gospel. But the case was the same when the Son of God was in his long retirement at Nazareth, and during the three years' course of preparation which the anointed Apostles passed through, before they went forth as messengers of God's grace to the nations. The preachers needed to save a lost world, are men of a very peculiar spirit, and of a certain order of gifts: No others, however great the number, will serve in their stead.

*The chief object of pursuit, in the work of preparation for the sacred office, is to learn how to preach.* This should be the end of all reading, all study, all applications of the mind and heart. To preach well, what attainment so great, so excellent, within a mortal's reach? No attainment beyond, I had almost said, beside this, should a candidate for the ministry care much to make. To such a man all languages, sciences, arts, accomplishments, are nothing, except as subservient to this great purpose. TO PREACH, to exert that instrumentality by which the ruined

souls of men may be recovered from the power of sin and raised to fellowship with God,—no one who undertakes this work, or is preparing to undertake it, should care for aught else but to do it in the best manner.

In pursuing this object, all possible exertions should be made on the part of those who aspire to the holy office; and the Church should lend them every facility and assistance: but they should remember, that after all, they will fall short of the end, unless they abide under divine illuminations, and come forth from their studies and their prayers, full of faith, and with the Spirit of God resting upon them. Men may be fitted in some sort, for the high places of the state, merely by nature and mental discipline; but it is only in deep communion with God, and by an unction from the Holy One, that ability to preach well can be acquired, or preachers be kept from prostituting their gifts to the low and criminal purposes of a worldly ambition or selfishness.

In a word, those who propose to spend their lives in the work of the ministry, may learn from the light which these re-

marks are designed to throw on its nature, somewhat of the spirit which it becomes them to possess, and which they should unceasingly cherish. They may see that men who enter into the ministry, and are not absorbed in the great business of that calling, are out of their proper place, and may prove a curse rather than a blessing to the Church ; —that before the Church raises her rejoicing voice at the prospect of an accession to the ministry, she should inquire not only what is the number but also what is the character of these new candidates.

There is reason for the deepest solicitude on this latter point. If there were among those who are preparing for the ministry in the different schools of our land, one David Brainerd, might not that individual be worth, as to prospective usefulness, more than all the rest ? If this be no improbability, what deep thoughtfulness should it excite throughout the entire Church, but especially in the ministry and those who design to belong to it ?—It should be considered, what it is that would make a single Brainerd more valuable than the many hun-

dreds of his fellows. It is not intellectual so much as moral excellence, not superiority of understanding or superiority of gifts, but superior piety and love to Christ, that would give him that great preëminence. Yet even he would not occupy so high an elevation as should be reached by every preacher of the gospel.

I wish I knew how to give a just impression to the thought, that what more than all things is wanted to make able preachers, is, a deep and an affectionate knowledge of Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings. To know languages, logic, philosophy and controversies, especially to ministers in certain situations, is of high importance; but the secret of Paul's great power and success in the ministry, in connection with his learning and rare gifts, was, that he counted all things but loss for the sake of gaining the most perfect acquaintance with the character, sufferings, death and resurrection, of his blessed Saviour and Lord. Any minister with a competence of talents, pursuing the same means of cultivating sympathy with Christ,

which were used by Paul, might attain to an eminence in preaching unexampled in this age. And surely all ministers and candidates for the ministry should esteem union and intimacy with Christ as highly as did Paul.

It is unworthy of the character of a Christian minister to seek to be called of men, *Rabbi, Rabbi*, and equally so to call any man on earth, *Father*. Reverence for worthies, ancient or modern, is a virtue which will ever be found associated with true humility ; but since the standard of ministerial excellence is heaven-high, above the point of attainment generally reached by ministers of any age, it were regarding man's short-comings more than God's requirements, for any one to depress himself below that point, or to fear rising above it, out of respect for human excellence. There must and will be improvement in the ministry. Who that considers that the world is to be converted by preaching, can avoid this conclusion, unless he forgets after what manner it is now managed throughout the Church? Great



changes are to be looked for, and few greater than in the character of preaching.

Not that zeal for innovation should be encouraged. To hold ancient opinions and usages in wanton disrespect; to deviate rashly from paths trodden by the great and the good of past generations, is proof of every thing more than Christian modesty or self-knowledge. But ambition to rise, even to the measure of the stature of Christ, deserves every encouragement. Why should we be obliged to search among the dead; why be referred to the days of Baxter, or of Paul, or of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, for instances of high spirituality among the anointed servants of God? The advantages for holy living were never greater than they are now. Holy light never shone with greater brightness or abundance. The voice of Providence, the necessities of the world, the character of the age, the honor of Christ; never more urgently demanded such a mode of life in the Christian ministry. It is holy living, raised to the height of apostolical example, which is to restore the apostolical way of

preaching. When there shall be a ministry who shall pray and meditate and LIVE like the Apostles, then will there be men who will preach like the Apostles.

## VI.

# PREACHING ON ABILITY.

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### PART FIRST.

FEW questions have been more agitated than that relating to man's ability or inability to obey God. As the immediate object of preaching is to induce obedience to God on the part of the hearers, this is a question in which preachers, as might be expected, have taken a peculiar interest. Almost every preacher, however indifferent or averse to theorizing on other points, has theorized, in some sort, here; and has adopted some philosophy, or classed himself with some school, which controls and fashions his manner of discourse in relation to this subject.

There is much ground for the presumption,

that, in respect to this point, as well as many others in popular theology, preaching has not been unobjectionable. Preachers are here abundantly charged with inconsistency and self-contradiction, not only by gainsayers, but by the wisest and best of their hearers, and by one another. Nor is this the only reason for thinking them unskilful in their management of this point. The multitude are at a loss what to think; and, to a great extent, their perplexity ends in their adopting the most serious mistakes. How many are there who neglect their salvation, either on the pretext that they can do nothing to save themselves; or, on the opposite persuasion, that they can save themselves when they please, and may therefore, with the risk only of meeting a sudden death, postpone their repentance to a more convenient season! How many others are there, who, though not perfectly careless, content themselves with what they call *waiting in the use of means*, while they still live in allowed sin; sincerely supposing that they can do nothing better, and and that nothing better can be reasonably required of them!

I need not stay to show that this is a most undesirable state of things. Whether preachers are in any degree responsible for it or not, it is what every one must deplore, who loves the souls of men. What could be more opposite to the wishes of such persons than to have the point before us involved in dispute or doubt? Obedience to God is the end of all preaching and all hearing: how much to be regretted, that when the pulpit has tried its utmost powers of persuasion, the people should be left in a labyrinth, a mizmaze of difficulties, respecting the possibility or the impossibility of doing that to which they are so zealously urged.

I have intended to intimate that this state of things among the people, has, to some extent, been brought about by the religious instruction to which they have been accustomed from the pulpit, particularly in respect to the point in question. I will now advert to what I consider unhappy specimens of preaching, in respect to this point, as preliminary to an exhibition of what I think a more excellent way. These, with few exceptions, may conveniently be reduced to three sorts.

The first, (which I shall notice very briefly,) is grounded on a denial of all power in man, in every sense, to obey the divine commands. Preachers who conceive of man as thus absolutely powerless, blame him for his sins, because, as they hold, he once had power in Adam; but they do not insist upon his immediate repentance. He had power to obey in Adam; but having disobeyed in him, he has no power to repent. He had none to do this in Adam; he has none in himself: and thus, being in every sense powerless, and it being obviously necessary that there must be power somewhere, to do what is to be done, these preachers cannot but see it to be unreasonable to enforce upon men obligation to instant repentance. Accordingly they do not enforce it, or do not enforce at least the immediate discharge of it. On the contrary, expressly telling their hearers that they have no power to repent, they set them about other things, for the performance of which they have power; namely, reading, praying, and attending externally upon religious ordinances. These, as performed without repentance, are admitted to be sinful; but on the



ground, that the omission of them would be yet more sinful, the hope is encouraged,—sometimes, strange to say, by appeals to scripture-promises,—that they will sooner or later be followed by an interposition of saving mercy. On the procedure of these preachers, it were easy to animadvert; but animadversion on it, at the present day, may be spared. To state it, is sufficient censure: Men directed to do what is admitted to be sin, in order to their coming to repentance, or securing the divine favor! Nor is the theory on which the direction proceeds less strange than the direction itself. On this too, however, I forbear remark. Happily this strain of preaching is less common than it has been. It will speedily pass away. A work\* of a distinguished English divine, the late Rev. Andrew Fuller, has, perhaps, been chiefly instru-

\* *The Gospel worthy of all Acceptation.* Though this excellent work is doubtless familiar to the preachers of our country, I am inclined to think that a general re-perusal of it, together with Part II. chap. iv. sec. 9, of Hopkins' System of Divinity, and certain other well-known productions on the same subject, would be seasonable and useful at the present time.

mental in producing this result. It has been greatly promoted, however, in our own land, by our numerous and powerful revivals of religion. Let our revivals multiply, and it will certainly disappear. Preaching of this kind, and religious revivals, are mutually repugnant and fatal to each other.

The second kind of preaching in relation to the present point, according to our classification, is, in the precise shape now to be examined, but in the beginning of its course amongst us.\* It professes to be very different from the former; but the difference, I apprehend, is more apparent than real. In its tendencies and bearings, it is nearly the same; and it is probable that, but for the peculiar

\* The prose writings of Mr. Coleridge, especially his "Aids to Reflection," have chiefly, if not exclusively, originated the strain of preaching to which I here allude; but I do not say that those writings directly countenance it in all particulars. They do so, unquestionably, in the main points: in other points, I think some of Mr. C.'s American friends are making a use of his philosophy never contemplated by him, and of which he might complain as an abuse. But "transcendental metaphysic" is finding its way into our schools and our pulpits, under the sanction of other names besides that of the Platonizing and meditative Coleridge.

philosophy of which it is the fruit, and certain doctrinal assumptions and consequent negations with which it is associated, its appearance would give pleasure to the class of preachers to whom we have been just advertising. It discards, or at least does not avow, the notion of our being blamable for disobedience, because we had power to obey in Adam; but it denies, with great emphasis, that we have any power IN OURSELVES. Power to obey, nevertheless, in some sort, it seems reluctant to deny us altogether; but it makes that power, previously at least to our actual obedience, wholly external to us; and even in our very obedience, if we have not misunderstood its peculiar phraseology, it is not power distinctively belonging to us, as separate or individual beings, but the Divine power itself, in some inconceivable way exerting itself in our exercises and acts.\* I find it difficult to state positively what its theory is, as to the *proximate* power with which our acts of holiness are performed; and should be happy, if it had distinctly and intelligibly

\* See Note, p. 182.

performed this task itself. Thus much, however, it does affirm, without qualification, —That man cannot do what God requires of him, *without the aid of divine grace*. It disallows, or at least makes no use of, the common distinction between natural and moral inability; and roundly asserts the impossibility of man's doing what the law of God requires, without gracious aid. And it rests this assertion on ground, which, if it were tenable, would be adequate to sustain it; namely: That the will of man has become corrupted,\* by having received a NATURE into itself, or subjected itself, in some mysterious manner, to the determination of NATURE; that is, by

\* "The will is ultimately self-determined, or it is no longer a *will*, under the law of perfect freedom, but a *nature* under the mechanism of cause and effect. And if by an act, to which it had determined itself, it has subjected itself to the determination of nature, (in the language of St. Paul, to the law of the flesh,) it receives a nature into itself, and so far it becomes a nature: and this is a corruption of the will, and a corrupt nature. It is also a *fall* of man, inasmuch as his will is the condition of personality; the ground and condition of the attribute which constitutes him *man*." Aids to Reflection, London ed. pp. 278, 279. Read the whole of the paragraph. It shows, if I have not misunderstood it, that Mr. Coleridge had no objection to the notion, that the will is de-

explanation,\* to physical necessity, or the mechanism of cause and effect. If the fact were as here declared, we should readily concede that no affirmation of human inability could be too bold or unqualified. Indeed, to say that man's will is subjected to the mechanism of cause and effect, or physical necessity, is equivalent to, nay, it is the same thing with saying, that man himself, in respect to the faculty or power of willing, of course of obeying God, is a mere machine, without God's gracious, and I would add, miraculous aid.†

If, in my examination of the doctrine in

terminated by a previous act of volition ; though Edwards has, as I have thought, proved that notion an absurdity.

\* " Whatever is comprised in the chain and mechanism of cause and effect, of course *necessitated*, and having its necessity in some other thing, antecedent or concurrent. This is said to be *natural* ; and the aggregate and system of all such things is NATURE." Aids, p. 71.

† Mr. Coleridge does not think that the faculty of reason in fallen man is wholly impotent, (Aids, p. 138,) or, that man has *no* will, which, he says, is what the doctrine of Edwards amounts to, (p. 155.) Man's will, he holds, is *diseased, enslaved, corrupted*, but yet not passive in his recovery to holiness, (p. 153.) That it has any power, however, to escape out of a state of impenitence and unbelief, he ascribes to the

question, I should seem to the reader strangely particular and argumentative, upon points hitherto deemed incontrovertibly certain ; my apology is, that these incontrovertible points at length are controverted, and that no alternative seems to be left me, but either to be silent, or to speak as I have done.

Let us begin by obtaining, if possible, a clear understanding of what is meant by gracious aid.\* Is it aid granted to all mankind ; or, that special influence of the Holy Spirit, which actually renews and saves a fore-chosen part ? If the latter, then all mankind, except the elect, being without gracious aid, are *in fact* subject, as to their will, to the mechanism of cause and effect, and by uncon-

supernatural aids vouchsafed in the christian dispensation, (pp. 153, 190, 311.) How a will, subjected to the determination of nature, or physical necessity, can, even with those aids, such as in fact they are, be otherwise than absolutely impotent, he does not explain.

\* "By the phrase, "In Christ," I mean all the supernatural aids vouchsafed, and conditionally promised, in the christian dispensation ; and among them, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive." Aids, p. 153. How is this,—which the world cannot receive ? Is it, bona fide, *aid*, if *it cannot be received* ? Or, was it not designed as aid *to the world* ?



trollable physical necessity, must abide in sin and perish ! If the former, I have several questions to ask :

In the first place, is the aid strictly *gracious* ? If so, then God, without being *unjust*, might have denied it to man. What then, if it had been denied to him ? The race commencing their existence with a corrupted will, (for so it is maintained they do commence it, though the fact, it is said, is a mystery,)\* beginning their existence with a will subject to evil by a mechanical necessity, and so remaining until they go away into everlasting punishment ! Other suppositions on this subject are strange ; but this destroys the foundations of God's empire. Is it said that God could not, in equity, have denied this aid to man ? So, as I understand, it has been said;† but if it be really so, the

\* Aids, pp. 278, 282.

† Is not this Mr. Coleridge's meaning, where he says, p. 270, " Now what would the idea of equity,—what would the law, inscribed by the Creator on the heart of man, seem to dictate in this case ? " (that is, of God's requiring the same perfect obedience of Adam's fallen posterity, that he had required of Adam himself.) " Surely, that the supplementary aids, the supernatural graces, correspondent to a law above

sense should be explained in which the aid is called *gracious*. It may be said, perhaps, that there was *grace* in making us men, rather than brutes, and also in dealing with us equitably after we were created ; but this certainly is using the term *grace* out of the ordinary signification. By *grace* is commonly meant favor, or blessing, which, without injustice, might have been withheld from existing creatures. God could not have equitably required us to exercise rational faculties, if he had not made us with such faculties ; and if the aid in question be such as he could not have denied us, and at the same time justly required us to obey him, this aid was as much, and in the same sense, *due* to us, as rational faculties themselves.

Assuming, then, that it was *due*, I ask again, What is *gained*, by placing man's power to obey God, out of, rather than in, himself? I should, of course, suppress this question, if I supposed it certain, from either

nature," (so he calls the law demanding perfect obedience,) " should be increased in proportion to the diminished strength of the agents, and the increased resistance to be overcome by them?"

scripture or consciousness, that the seat of man's power is *not* in himself; but, allowing this to be doubtful, the question may not be without some significance. As the power itself could not be denied to man without injustice, *what matter*, whether the seat of it be within or without him? It must be in him, surely, *when it is exerted by him*, wherever its seat may be at other times. It must, moreover, be always *at hand*, and why not as well be always in him?

But it may not be irrelevant to ask, thirdly, Is it admitted that it is always at hand? Is it truly *at the command of men*? If not, what is our state the better for it? If it be, is it not remarkable, that (as the fact is, supposing the doctrine of *special grace* to be true,) no man since the world began ever used it? This question is not improperly put to those who would make man's not having, in any instance, *used* natural power, a proof of his not *having* it. It is an argument, by them at least, deserving consideration. Why has no individual used this ever-present aid? For if the doctrine of SPECIAL grace be not set aside by this other doctrine of grace *univer-*

*sal* and *due*, it is the fact, that no one, of himself, has ever used it.

The doctrine of special grace, however, may be held in doubt by those I am opposing ; and it may be insisted on by them, (as, if I am not mistaken, it has been, and will be yet more and more,) that men who obey God, do it by the sole help of grace universal and common ; in which case, our last question were inapposite. It may nevertheless be well in passing, to ask another question. If this 'gracious aid' is always at hand and ready for use, why is it that in the great majority of instances it never is used ? If a *gracious ability* may be possessed and not be used, then a *natural ability* may be possessed and not be used ? The common argument, then, to prove that the sinner has not natural ability, derived from the fact that he does not use it, I think must be abandoned. I proceed to ask once more :

Admitting the fact to be as here alleged, that when man obeys God, he does it by power dwelling out of himself,—power in Jesus Christ, vouchsafed conditionally to the race,—must it not follow, that the power

which directly and *proximately* originates human obedience, is it not human, but divine power? It is the common opinion of Christians, that it is by the operation of the gracious power of God, that men are brought to obey him; but that, when they do obey him, they do it, strictly speaking, with their own attribute of power, not their Maker's. So it must be. Obedience to God, if it is any thing, is right moral action; and right moral action is the right exercise or use of the moral powers. Love to God, repentance for sin, faith in the Saviour, are and must be the acts or exercises of the powers or faculties of him of whom these exercises are affirmed. The proximate powers in exercise must be his own subjective mental powers, or the acts cannot be his own acts.

If the proximate power in exercise, in the case of right action on the part of man, is the power not of man but of God, then, since an attribute can be exercised only by the Being who possesses it, man loving God is God loving himself, and man repenting of sin is God repenting of sin, and man believing in Christ is God believing in Christ. These

repulsive absurdities are palpably involved in denying that the proximate power exercised when man obeys God is strictly man's own proper power. But to admit that man loves God, repents of sin, etc. in the exercise of his own power, and yet deny his power to love God, repent, etc. is a direct contradiction. How can that be exercised which has no existence?

But on the supposition before us, the proximate power exercised in human obedience is not a human attribute; the obedience rendered is not rendered with human power. With what propriety can power, which dwells out of man,—and which does not belong to him, as man, but which belongs to God, or to Christ,—be called human? It ought to be called, as it truly is, divine; the very power itself of the Divine Being, as contradistinguished from power appropriately belonging to man, or any other creature, as such. And this agrees perfectly with explanations which have been given of this subject.\* I have heard it illustrated by the

\* It agrees also with the language generally used by Mr.



feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves. The disciples, in distributing the loaves, found, that the more they distributed of them, the more they grew in their hands. Where was the power, it was demanded, which performed the work? That power, unquestionably, was in Christ. It was not the power of the disciples, but of the Master, as contra-distinguished from them, that made the bread multiply itself in their hands; and if the case be parallel to an instance of common obedience, truly the proximate power by which men obey their Maker, is their Maker's peculiar attribute of power, not their own.

The story of the man, who, at the word

Coleridge and his admirers, when speaking on the subject before us. "Thus we see," (says Mr. C. remarking on Gal. 2: 20.) "even our faith is not ours in its origin; but it is the faith of the Son of God" (Christ's personal faith!!) "graciously communicated to us." "The faith of the Son of God," means here, he thinks—Christ's personal faith!!! Lit. Rem. p. 369.—Again: When we are told that such expressions as, "I am the life," "Christ in you," "Christ liveth in me," "I in them," etc. are not to be taken tropically or metaphorically,—and are not explicitly told how they are to be taken; we should not be censured for either declining all effort to understand them in the sense of those who make the assertion, or giving to them the only explication of which, setting aside the tropical sense, they seem to us susceptible.

of Christ, raised his withered arm, has been adduced as another illustration. The power which restored that arm, was, unquestionably, not in the man; nor did it belong to him as a man: it was the personal strength of Jesus Christ. If the illustration be apt, such is the power exercised in every instance in which man obeys God. It is not a natural attribute of the human body or mind; it is not human power, but divine. The question returns, (is it not surprising, that there should be occasion to ask it?) Does human obedience proceed directly and proximately from the exertion of God's attribute of power, or man's? Must we enter into an argument to prove that it does not proceed from the former? Is not our consciousness argument enough? Are not all the foundations for human praise or blame destroyed, on the supposition that human actions are performed with the personal power of God? Are men blamable for not obeying God? But surely they cannot be blamed for not exercising divine power. To recur again to the fore-cited illustrations:—The disciples would have been blamable, had they not gone about

to distribute bread to the multitude, as commanded by their Master. They had power in themselves to do that; they had muscular strength, and that strength was subject to their wills. But if there had been a deficiency of bread, and the multitude had not in fact been supplied with it, would the disciples, or their Master, who undertook the miracle, have been in fault? The man with the withered arm would have been blamable, had he not, at Christ's word,\* *willed* to lift his arm; for though the muscles of his arm had perished, he still had a human will, and was a free-agent. But, had not the lifting

\* The man was commanded, it has been urged, not to will to lift his arm, but to lift it. So Lazarus was commanded to "come forth" from his grave; and the raging sea to "be still." Is there no difference between such commands, and God's commanding all men everywhere to repent? What are commands, in such cases, but proper indications of connection between miracles and the agent who performs them? Had not such a call from Christ, as, "Lazarus, come forth," or something equivalent, preceded his resurrection, where would have been the evidence, that the power which wrought the miracle, was that of our Lord? Is it not surprising, that such cases, and the common requisitions to repent, believe, etc., should be strenuously insisted on as parallel!

of his arm followed his volition to lift it,—not his, certainly, but Christ's, would have been the failure. Men cannot be praised for doing, or blamed for not doing, the appropriate acts of God.

I should owe the reader an apology for detaining him a moment with remarks like these, if controversy on the other side did not seem to demand them. If there be any thing of which we can be certain, it is this: that the faculty, power, strength, (call it what we will,) with which man obeys his Maker, when the Spirit makes him willing, dwells in man himself, and is, strictly speaking, his own, and not another's. He may be averse to the exercise of his power in a right manner, and external agency may be necessary to overcome his aversion; and this fact may make it proper to say, in a sense, that his strength, or power, lies out of himself: and it may be important, as we know it is in the present case, that the truth thus figuratively and rhetorically expressed, be prominently exhibited. But, figure and rhetoric apart, the precise fact is, that man obeys God (under, it is true, a special agency

of the Holy Spirit,) in the exercise of his own personal strength,—strength belonging to him, as a responsible human being. Fallen man is, indeed, placed under redemptive and recovering influences; and these influences were, in various respects, and on various accounts, necessary to his becoming again conformed to the will and image of his Maker. But, take his power to obey out of him, and not even these influences would be available. There must be something more than redemption, and something even beyond special grace, as at present granted: there must be a strictly creative agency,—an agency which can make man over again. This is plainly indispensable; for, deny us the faculties of a man, and we are no longer men; and those faculties are denied us, if we have in ourselves no power, no strength, no any thing, with which we may obey our Maker. Take that power from us, and we may be idiots, or animated masses of flesh, but we are not responsible men. Speak not of man, in this case, as fallen, depraved, dead in sin; but speak of him as having lost his essential human nature. And call his recovery not a redemp-

tion, but a physical creation ; as in such a case it certainly would be : for, if no power be left in us to obey God with, what should we be after redemption, provided we remain physically the same that we are at present ? We should still have no power to obey with ; that is, we should not, even after redemption and recovery, be responsible human beings.

Some embarrass themselves by strangely confounding natural power, or the faculties of the mind, with opportunity or motive to exertion.\* Man, irrespectively of divine grace, would have no reason or inducement for exert-

\* " That it is in the power of the will, either to repent or have faith, in the gospel sense of the words, is itself a consequence of the redemption of mankind, a free gift of the Redeemer,"—Aids, p. 311. If the meaning of this be, that man could not have believed in a Saviour, had there been no Saviour ; and could not have repented in the absence of all evidence of his being a sinner, its truth is palpable. But the question is : Supposing a Saviour, and a command to believe in him,—has man, in these circumstances, natural power in himself to obey this command ? We could not be reasonably required to love, if there were nothing to be loved ; to repent, if there were nothing to be repented of ; to believe, if there were nothing to be believed in ; but, with the proper objects of these acts before us, have we still no natural powers for their performance ?—See Dr. Witherspoon on this point, in the sequel.



ing himself; the result being already ascertained and declared, that effectual exertion, without that grace, never will be made. But how is this an argument of his not having *natural power*? Is there no important difference between want of power and want of inducement, or opportunity to exert it? One man cannot use hands, because he has none; another, who has hands, cannot use them, for want of an object, or because he knows all effort to use them would be vain. Is the difference between these two cases undistinguishable, or not deserving notice? Is it possible that there should be any exact speaking or thinking on the subject before us, where this difference is overlooked?

Some seem to think that they at once refute every argument for our having natural power, by demanding if the Bible does not represent men as powerless. Taking the word *powerless* in the absolute sense here intended, nothing could be farther from the truth, than this supposition. We should not only admit, but, with the utmost prominence, should constantly exhibit, and strenuously enforce, the true statements of scripture

on this subject. It is of the highest importance that preachers of the gospel declare the absoluteness of man's moral impotence, or the entire aversion of his heart to goodness, and his consequent dependence on the renewing grace of God. But it is no less important, and no less scriptural, to maintain the natural power, than the moral impotence, of man. The Bible, when speaking on this subject, always designs to unfold the entire-ness of human depravity; not to teach, that men are in every sense unable to be better than they are; that is, if we can affix any meaning to this language, that they are not responsible or real men. Men, living men, are said in scripture to be dead; that is, dead in sin, or disobedience to God,—which implies power to obey him, the self-same faculties being employed in doing both. They cannot, it is affirmed, believe; not because they have no faculties or power to believe with; but because they are too proud, or too worldly-minded to do so. The carnal mind, says Paul, is enmity against God; and *therefore*, because it is enmity,—not because those who have such a mind, are physically incapable of hav-

ing any other,—it cannot be subject to the law of God. To make the Bible teach that men, constitutionally, are without power to do what God requires of them, is to wrest it from its obvious import, for the purpose of obtaining its sanction to what seems to me absurd.

But where, it is again demanded, does the Bible give men this power? As if without a positive proof-text on this subject, there could be no sufficient testimony. The Bible gives it to them, I reply, wherever it calls upon them to exercise it. That it does call upon them to exercise it, is past dispute; and is not this virtually affirming that they possess it? It certainly is affirming it in the strongest manner, unless Scripture-language is to be interpreted differently from all human language, as elsewhere used, both in books and conversation. To demand an explicit proof-text in this case, would be almost equivalent to demanding if the Bible anywhere asserts, in so many words, that there is a God. This demand should rather be made of those who make the Bible responsible for the opposite

dogma. They who assert it, as a doctrine of the Bible, that man has no natural power to obey his Maker, should be able to sustain the assertion by the clearest scripture-warrant. It is a bold assertion. If the mouth of the Lord hath made it, let us know when or where.

I think I have adduced the most decisive proof that the contrary assertion is in substance made. God's calling upon men to obey him, proves, in the most perfect manner, that they have power to obey him; since obeying him is nothing other than actually exerting such power. The conclusiveness of this argument is, however, denied. God's call, it is alleged, is always accompanied with the power of the Spirit; with which power alone the call is required to be obeyed. This is *assertion*, but where is the proof? The authors of it require it to be *disproved*; but let them not suppose that reasoning has no laws. Let them, I insist, prove their own assertion. Where, in all Scripture, is it said, or in any way implied, either that the power of the Spirit always accompanies the call to repentance; or, that the call requires men to

obey with that power, and not their own? Here the matter might be left; since assertions unproved, however agreeable to a theory, have no claim to be admitted as truth, or argument.

But this assertion may be easily disproved. It is demonstrably untrue. I appeal to the parable of the talents, Matt. xxv, and Luke, xix. I ask for the meaning of this passage, "to every one according *to his several ability*." How was the slothful servant condemned out of his own mouth? Was it not on the conceded principle, that he had not done what he was *able* to do? Is not the very question now under discussion brought up in this parable? Does not the slothful servant actually assert his inability to do what was required? And is he not condemned solely on the principle, that man's obligations and man's ability are commensurate? If this is not the design and import of this part of the parable, has it any meaning whatever? Is it not as plain, that our opponents, in pleading for man's inability to obey God, are in the wrong, as that the slothful servant was in the wrong? And, with such a passage in the book of in-

spiration, are we to be challenged for proof-texts, on the question of man's power to do what God requires?

But, lest it should be said, that this only shows that man has ability, without deciding whether it be natural, or from the Spirit, (a strange doubt, indeed!) I appeal to another text. I am tempted to ask those who deny man's power to perform his duty, if they have ever read the law of their Maker? If they have, do they not know that God's requisitions are limited to man's powers? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Is not the requisition here restricted to the right use of man's powers? Does it extend to, or include, any thing else? Whose powers is man required to love with? *Thy* heart, *thy* soul, *thy* strength, *thy* mind. Were the sinner to love God with all the powers he has, would he not, in so doing, become perfectly holy? And does he need any new powers? Has he no power, no ability, when he would be perfect were he to love God with the powers which he actually possesses! Let



any one read the divine law, and say, if he can, that man has no heart, no soul, no strength, no mind, which qualifies him to love God.

Besides, what, according to scripture, is the primary ground of man's condemnation? Not his having refused the proffered power of the Spirit, but his not having used his own faculties aright. Thus, the heathen are declared to be inexcusable; not because they have rejected the Spirit, but because they are rational beings, and creation shows to them the perfections of its Author. They are men; God's glory is spread out before them, over his works; *therefore*, they are without excuse for not knowing and loving God. The conclusion follows, from the premises mentioned; no other premise is required to justify it. The heathen, depraved as they are, are condemned on this sole account. They are not condemned for passing into idolatry, out of a state of purity and innocence. They had never been in such a state. Like the rest of Adam's race, they were depraved in their beginning; and, their depravity notwithstanding, they are condemned for being idolaters,

simply on the ground, that the works of creation afforded them the means of knowing the true God. So teaches the apostle Paul. Had some one now said to him,—“ These heathen were corrupt; evil was already in their will, which consequently was subjected to physical necessity; God never required them to know and love him, except, as at the same time proffering them his Spirit;”<sup>\*</sup> would not the apostle have thought that he had to do with a gainsayer?

Further, the irresistible evidence of human consciousness is against the notion I oppose. When the call to repentance is obeyed, it is obeyed indeed under the renewing influence of the Spirit of God, whose work herein is doubtless one of the most glorious of all the instances of the divine power and goodness; but still, it is obeyed by the human mind itself, in the exercise of its own faculties. The repenting sinner’s consciousness, I say again, is against the supposition, that he takes another’s power, and repents with that, and not his own. He is perfectly conscious that he does not do this,—as conscious, as that he

<sup>\*</sup> I have repeatedly had to encounter this objection.

does not, in his ordinary mental exercises, think with the thinking power of another's mind, or feel with another's power of feeling. He knows, indeed, from the testimony of God, that, independently of the Holy Spirit's influence, he never would have repented; but he also knows from consciousness, that the power which he exerts in repentance, though exerted under the Spirit's operation, is the power of his own mind; that same natural power, with which he has been thinking, loving, hating, etc. all his life.

But this is not all I have to say. A question remains to be answered, granting what these persons need to support their theory. Be it, that the Spirit goes along with the call to obedience, and that they are required to obey with the Spirit's power, not their own: this, then, is the requisition, that men obey God, with the power of the Spirit. This is the divine command: have they natural power to obey it? My position is, that men have natural power to do *whatever* God requires. Have they natural power to obey him with the Spirit, or to avail themselves of

the Spirit's power, in order to obey him? I have heard this question repeatedly answered in the negative; and in perfect consistency, surely, with a theory which asserts, that man's will is subjected to physical necessity or the mechanism of cause and effect.

As "responsibility does not stretch beyond the natural powers," this doctrine involves, as a just consequence, the exculpation of all human sin, and a release from moral obligation. But not so, say its advocates: though men have no natural power, they are still blamable for their sins, because they voluntarily disabled themselves. This, however, is an insufficient vindication. If men have deprived themselves of their natural power, (which, however, they can never do, unless they can annihilate their rational being,) let them be blamed and punished for doing themselves such an injury; but after punishing them fully, according to the demerit of that deed, let not continued and everlasting tyranny toward them be justified: and tyranny it would be, to exact of them, under new penalties, the exercise of a power not belonging to them. So all men judge. A man might be

punishable for putting out his own eye ; but to punish him for not seeing after his eye is out, and to go on thus punishing him as long as he lives, (which, upon this principle, might be done,) would be a stranger instance of tyranny than any to be found in the history of human oppressions and crimes.

The advocates of this doctrine, as if it would help their cause to find others in as much trouble as themselves, cease contending with their own insuperable difficulties, to demand of us, whether our scheme has any advantage over theirs ; since we hold, that whatever power men may have, they never will use it until they become the subjects of special grace. Declare this to men, and is not the possibility of their becoming the subjects of special grace, the only motive to effort which is left before their minds ? Still, the advantage of not holding that men have no natural power, is manifestly much, every way. The fact just mentioned, is man's great and all-comprehending motive to effort ; but if man has no natural power, even effort, under whatever motives, would be impossible. There cannot be an effort to

exert power where there is no power. Is it said, that the effort should not be, *to exert power to obey God*,—but *to obtain, or avail oneself of, gracious aid*? I am aware that this must be assumed by our opponents; and the assumption is fatal to their cause. It leads, as I shall soon attempt to show, to a way of preaching on this subject, which should make all who would preach as the Bible does, and as reason, truth, and wisdom demand, stand in doubt of the theory from which it proceeds. In the mean time I observe, in reply: (1.) That nothing is gained by distinguishing between exerting power to obey God, and to obtain the aid of divine grace. When the will is subjected to nature, or physical necessity, or the mechanism of cause and effect, there is an end of all freedom,\* all action, save that which is mechanical or necessary. Even the grace of God, as now vouchsafed, would be inadequate, had man no natural power. The end of divine

\* So says Mr. Coleridge expressly: "A nature is as inconsistent with freedom, as free choice with an incapacity of choosing aught but evil." *Aids*, p. 272.



grace is to induce obedience, or bring existing power to obey God into exercise ; but if no such power exists in man, it must be created and given to him before he can exercise it. A physical creation is indispensable,—a thing demanding, not the influence of the Spirit, as granted in the christian dispensation, but an exercise of physical power strictly creative. (2.) The distinction itself is a serious mistake. No proof is offered in favor of it : it is wholly *gratuitous* ; and it is palpably contrary to the truth. Is it so, that men should not *directly* exert themselves to obey God ; but, postponing obedience, as if that were not the first concern, seek, otherwise than in the way of obedience itself, to avail themselves of grace, in order that they may be able to obey ? What is this, but the doctrine of the class of preachers first mentioned,—a doctrine which Fuller, and Hopkins, and our glorious revivals, and the spirit of the age, had, as we have been fondly hoping, well-nigh banished out of the church ? Is this doctrine, after all, true ? It is not only untrue, but in the highest degree hurtful to the interests of holiness. Men should,

first of all, immediately exert themselves to obey God, and, as thus exerting themselves, and *not otherwise*, hope to secure a part in the sanctifying and saving influences of divine grace. Duty, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, all the truths of the gospel, and all the motives of eternity and time, demand that men set themselves, directly and immediately, to OBEY God; and to do any thing else, under the pretence of seeking grace, is to turn grace into licentiousness. Men should set themselves to do what grace inclines them to do, and what, when given, it results in, namely, obedience to God. They should “stir themselves up,” not to exercises of “prudence,” or “morality,” or penance, or any thing not including true obedience to the divine will. This, unquestionably, is what men should set themselves to do; but how can they set themselves to do what they have no natural power to do? Having no such power, how can they make an effort; how can they, in any way, try to exert it,—to exert what is not in them?

I would ask, whether some persons may not have erred in this matter, from their not

carefully considering what it is that God does, or rather what he does not do, in bringing men to obey him? The work of the divine power and grace, which has human obedience as its result, is one of surpassing glory and excellence, which excites angelic admiration, and will be celebrated for ever in the praises of eternity. All that God does in performing this work, no one beside himself can know. But there is one thing at least, which we know he does not do: he does not so operate either *upon* men or *in* them, as to make their actions, by his operation, any the less theirs. They are still their actions, and theirs exclusively. They are not *jointly* their actions and God's, but theirs, absolutely and only. *Repenting*, for example, whatever God may do in bringing it about, is not the joint action of God and the sinner, but the sinner's, and his only. So of loving, believing, hoping, confiding, and every other instance of obedience. This, I presume, is out of all dispute. But is it never denied in principle and theory? Is it not denied, theoretically at least, by those who place man's need of help from God in his having no natural

power? To us, nothing appears more certain. According to them, men are required to do certain actions; but, being physically powerless to do them of themselves, God joins his strength to theirs; thus, between the two they are accomplished. And are they not strictly the joint actions of the two? If a man, finding himself unable to raise a certain weight, calls to his neighbor to supply his deficiency of power, and so between them the weight is raised, whose now is the action of raising it? Unquestionably it is neither's, exclusively of the other; it is the joint action of both. Thus, in the case before us, if man wants natural strength to obey God, and God helps him to obey, by exerting his own strength, in the very act of obedience, the act performed, allowing man to have any part in it, is the joint action of man and his Maker. I know not how this conclusion can be avoided. I have heard it said, indeed, that, as the action, in the case of obeying God, pertains to the sphere of "the Spiritual," it may be different as to authorship, from such an action as that above instanced, though done by the joint agency of

man and the Spirit; but of this there is no proof; and they who assert, that in spiritual acts, individual agencies are confounded, should prove what they say.

It is hence, I think, certain, that when man obeys God, though he does this under a mighty operation of the Holy Spirit, he does it with his own natural power, not another's, — power which belongs to him, as a rational and responsible creature, and which he freely exerts at the time. God graciously aids in this case; but he aids, not by directly exerting his own attribute of power in the action, but by bringing it to pass, in methods untraceable by us, that man exerts the power which belongs to him as a man. He requires him to exert that power, in obedience, be it more or less. Man refuses to exert it. If now, God, by his Holy Spirit, performs his work of effectual grace, the design and end of what he does is to secure the man's exerting the power he first declined exerting; so that the actions of obedience are exclusively those of man, not of man and God conjointly.

Having examined the theory itself, which, by making the will of man subject to the de-



termination of nature, physically disenables him to obey his Maker, let us briefly consider the strain of preaching to which this theory leads, relatively to the point in hand. I have already, in a single sentence, glanced at it. It is substantially the same with that of the first class of preachers. It does not enforce the immediate discharge of obligation to obey God. It does not seem to recognize men as under this obligation, except as participants of gracious aid. A principle on which, according to my understanding of it, it proceeds, is, that fallen beings, wholly excluded from this aid, are not under obligation to become holy; not having, in any sense or measure, power to become so. Hell, of course, is a place of punishment, not of continued rebellion; and rebellion on earth consists exclusively in not availing ourselves of that power to obey, which exists, out of ourselves, in the redemptive system under which we here live. There is no sin, simply in not exercising natural power of our own; for we have no such power: our sin, "all that is exclusively attributable to our own act," consists in refusing to avail ourselves of a power," which



is "a consequence of the redemption of mankind, a free gift of the Redeemer."\* This, therefore, is that to which this preaching exhorts us; not directly to repent, or become holy, nor to exert ourselves to that end immediately; but, *in some other way*, to avail ourselves of a power which is "a free gift of the Redeemer." What the way is in which this may be done, has not, as far as I know, been specifically pointed out; but the process passed through, in becoming truly religious, is represented as gradual:† two stages, pru-

\* Aids, p. 311.

† Thus says Mr. Coleridge, Aids, p. 23, in explaining how prudence may "lead and be subservient to" religion, "a higher principle than itself;"—"The enfeebled convalescent is reconciled to his crutches, and thankfully makes use of them," (as, it would seem, a sinner on the way to become religious, should submit first to practices of prudence,) "not only because they are necessary for his immediate support," (the Jailor, Acts xvi., could, however, dispense with antecedent prudential exercises; and the three thousand also, who were converted on the day of Pentecost,) "but, likewise, because they are the means and conditions of EXERCISE; and by exercise, of establishing, gradatim, paulatim, that strength, flexibility, and almost spontaneous obedience of the muscles, which the idea and cheering presentiment of health," (an unrenowned man, of course, may be *well-affected* toward religion, but no more able to become religious, than a valetudinarian to become

dence and morality, must be successively gone over before we can come to religion : \* and the actions done in these different stages, are not only different in kind, but while we are in the earlier stages, the actions done in the last, are, it would seem, natural impossi-

healthy, at once,) "holds out to him. He finds their *value*, in their present necessity, and their *worth*, as they are the instruments of finally superseding it." Is this the scriptural way to become religious !

\* "To understand aright what morality is, we must first learn what prudence is, and what acts and obligations are *prudential* ; and having removed these to a class of their own, we shall find it comparatively easy to determine what acts and duties belong to morality. What the duties of MORALITY are, the apostle instructs the believer in full, reducing them under two heads : negative, to keep himself pure from the world ; and positive, beneficence with sympathy and loving-kindness, that is, love of his fellow-men (his kind) as himself. Last and highest, come the *spiritual*, comprising all the truths, acts, and duties that have an especial reference to the timeless, the permanent, the eternal : to the sincere love of the true, as truth, of the good, as good : and of God, as both in one." Aids, pp. 25, 26. Mr. Coleridge inculcates then a morality and a prudence, which includes no sincere love of the true, as truth, of the good, as good ; and of God, as including both the true and the good. But does the Bible inculcate such a morality or such a prudence ! What, in the estimation of the Bible, is the prudent or the moral man, who does not truly love God, but is an enemy at heart to God and goodness ?

bilities.\* I know not whether those who hold the notion of power, on which I have been remarking, conform their preaching generally to this description; but the materials of the description are distinctly afforded by the author, who, as far as I know, has occasioned all the currency which the notion has in this country. According to that author, to demand of men generally, a conversion begun and completed in the same moment, is "fanatical and dangerous."† Of course,

\* "If, then, *the time has not yet come* for any thing higher, act on the maxim of seeking the most pleasure with the least pain," etc. Aids, p. 40. The time for being truly religious, *not yet come!*

† "We meddle not with the dispute respecting *conversion*, whether, and in what sense, necessary in all christians. It is sufficient for our purpose, that a very *large* number of men, even in christian countries, *need* to be converted, and, that not a few we trust have been. The tenet becomes fanatical and dangerous, only when rare and extraordinary exceptions are made to the general rule;—when what was vouchsafed to the apostle of the Gentiles by especial grace, and for an especial purpose, viz. a conversion begun and completed in the same moment, is demanded or expected of all men, as a necessary sign and pledge of their election." Aids, pp. 20, 21. Taking the instances of conversion recorded in the new testament as examples, we should conclude, that not sudden, but *gradual* conversions, if, in strict truth, there be any such, are the *rare and extraordinary exceptions*. Unques-

the general demand should be, that turning from sin to God be not done at once, but *gradatim paulatim*—by little and little. This the same author more explicitly teaches. “If,” he says, “the time has not yet come for any thing

tionably God demands of every sinner an instantaneous conversion,—a conversion begun and completed in the same moment,—from sin to himself; and every sinner should tremble for himself, as obnoxious to the infinite wrath of God, who hesitates to meet the demand. The Bible seems to know nothing of gradual conversions; though doubtless there are many instances of persons, who, after a period longer or shorter, of outward reformations, and internal conflicts with the Spirit of grace, are at length made willing to give their hearts to God. The conversion, however, of such persons is, strictly speaking, instantaneous. If to demand instantaneous conversion, be fanatical and dangerous, such is the character of all our revival-preaching; and, moreover, of all fanatics, the apostles seem to have been the greatest. Mr. Coleridge, I have not omitted to notice, makes it fanatical to demand of all men an instantaneous conversion, *as the sign and pledge of their election*. But if by *sign* and *pledge*, any thing more be meant than *proper evidence* of their election, no one demands it; if proper evidence of election be meant, since conversion alone is such evidence, nothing less should be demanded; and conversion certainly, in every instance, should be instantaneous. We ought not to feel certain that any one is elected, if he be not converted, and no man ought to remain unconverted one moment. As to the question, whether a man has been converted or not, the evidence which should satisfy us, is a holy and spiritual life.

higher, act on the principle of seeking the most pleasure with the least pain." Hence may result, "in you, a state of being directly and indirectly favorable to the germination and upspring of a nobler seed." Here is the master doing the business of exhortation. He gives us, doubtless, what he considers a just exemplification of his own principles. Whether his disciples, generally, follow in his footsteps, I know not; but all the preaching that I have heard from them, on this subject, accords well with the sentiments above given.

Is it now desirable that this kind of preaching should become common? Is it to be wished that preaching generally should proceed on the assumptions, that men are not to be urged to a prompt discharge of their spiritual obligations; that they are not indeed under obligation, except as living under a dispensation of grace; that creatures in the world of woe, debarred, as they are, from grace, are no longer bound to obey the divine law; that all *our* sin consists in not availing ourselves of a power, which is a free gift of the Redeemer; and, that it is fanatical and dangerous to urge upon sinners an instan-



taneous conversion to God? If these principles are to be adopted by ministers of religion, as their guides in preaching, should they not first inquire for some evidence of their truth? Paradoxes are not, of course, false; but they should neither be advanced nor received without strong attendant proofs; especially when their reception, as in the present case, is inconsistent with principles which appeal, in self-support, to reason, to scripture, and to their own efficacy, as discovered in mighty revivals of religion. Let the strong reasons for these doctrines be produced. Let it be proved, if it can be, that we have been in error, in holding that all rational and voluntary creatures, be their circumstances what they may, are bound, simply because they are rational and voluntary, to love and serve their Maker. Let it be shown, if it can be done, that we should not be required to turn immediately from sin to holiness, from rejecting Christ, to believing on and serving him. May any aid be derived from Scripture in performing such a task? To us it is astonishing, that professed believers in the Bible should be so attached to any philoso-



phy, as to carry it out to results which the Bible, unless we have utterly mistaken its meaning, disowns, as manifestly as it does friendliness to sin. Should this strain of preaching become predominant, would the voice of the pulpit be any longer like the voice of God in his word? Would it be quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, in the hearts of self-excusing and stubborn rebels against the law and grace of God? Would it not be more as the sweetest music, than as thunder, to such obstinately impenitent sinners? I ask these questions, not because I have any doubt. Our preaching would lose all awakening and converting power, and the scenes of revivals would come to a speedy end. There is nothing more impotent, as to all the ends which the gospel aims to accomplish, than preaching, however intellectual and elaborate, which does not proclaim, distinctly and aloud, the unchangeable obligation of all men to keep the law of God, and demand immediate repentance of the transgressor; and insist, with the utmost urgency, on the instantaneous performance of that duty. Law, grace, holi-

ness, God, and all eternal things, will, as a matter of course, be despised by the people, where preachers, in any way, or on any pretext whatever, give them a dispensation from strict duty, or consent to any kind or degree of *gradualism* in conversion. Let American preachers hereafter exemplify, in their instruction from the pulpit, the principles just stated, and they would at once cease to be, (what heretofore they have been, in a high degree,) the glory of the church; and our land instead of being the land of religious revivals,—under the mighty means of corruption which are in ceaseless operation among us, unrestrained, as they would be, by any adequate counter-influence from the pulpit,—would soon, like the miry places and the marishes in the vision of the prophet, be given to salt.

## VII.

# PREACHING ON ABILITY.

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### PART SECOND.

THE third mode of proceeding, which I do not think perfectly just and scriptural, is that of preachers who are correct in their doctrine concerning human power. The distinction which all mankind make between inclination and ability, in reference to action generally, they make in reference to obeying the commands of God.\* A man who has a

\* Dr. Witherspoon was in this class of preachers, at least on the point in question. "You will perhaps say, to keep the commands of God, is above our power. Have not you yourself often taught us, that no mere man, in this life, is able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? Can that be reasonable then, that is impossible? Now consider, I pray you, what sort of impossibility this is. It is not natural, but moral. IT IS NOT WANT OF POWER, BUT WANT OF INCLINA-

sound mind, can think: an idiot cannot think. A man who has the use of eyes, can see: a blind man cannot see. There is a

tion. Nothing is required of us, that is unsuitable to our situation, or above our natural powers; so far from it, that even what was our duty before, if by any accident it becomes impossible in this sense, it ceases to be a duty. God no where commands you to be taller or stronger than he has made you: and though he commands you to labor, working with your hands, if he confines you by sickness, this duty no longer binds. He has given you faculties and natural powers for every thing that he requires. Are not all your powers, both of mind and body, as fit for your Maker's service as any other purpose? Is not the tongue as fit to speak truth as falsehood; and every member of the body as fit to do what is lawful or useful, as what is sinful or hurtful? The commands of God, then, are neither impossible nor difficult to those who are willing to obey them. No man can say, with truth, that he desired with all his heart to do his Maker's will, and could not." Witherspoon's Works, Vol. II. p. 279.

Dr. Mason, also, could not dispense, in preaching, with this distinction. See what a sharp two-edged sword it was in his lips. "I cannot do it," replies one: and one, it may be, not without moments of serious and tender emotion upon this very point: '*I cannot do it.*' My soul bleeds for thee, thou unhappy! But it *must* be done, or thou art lost for ever. Yet what is the amount of that expression: in the mouth of some, a flaunting excuse, and of others, a bitter complaint,—I cannot? Is the inability to believe in Christ different from an inability to perform any other duty? Is there any harder necessity of calling the God of truth a LIAR, in *not believing the record which he hath given of his SON*, than of com-

difference in these cases, and all men here distinguish. There is a like difference in respect to ability to obey God, between a rational creature and an irrational one, a sane man and a maniac. One of these in every point of view, cannot, and the other can, discharge the obligations of morality. The difference here is as radical as in the other cases ; and why should we not here also distinguish ? All reasoning, all intelligible and convincing discourse on man's moral nature and relations, must be at an end where this distinction is not made. So these preachers think ; and hence, the distinction is clearly taken and urgently insisted on, as vital and indispensable, in their preaching.—See, as examples, the extracts from the writings of Drs. Witherspoon and Mason, quoted in the note at the foot of these pages.—They assert, that those who have the use of eyes, can see : so, and in the self-same

mitting any other sin ? The inability created, the necessity imposed, by the ENMITY *of the carnal mind against God* ? It is the inability of wickedness, and nothing else. Instead of being an apology, it is itself the *essential* crime." Works of Rev. J. M. Mason, D. D., vol. iv. p. 177. How differently this sounds, from telling men that they have no natural power, etc !

sense, creatures with such faculties as God has given to man, can obey their Maker. They teach, that it is not with man, in respect to his moral character and conduct, as it is in respect to the hue of his skin, or the height of his stature, over which he has no control, and for which, of course, he is not responsible. They make some account, in their preaching, of our having intellectual and moral faculties, instead of not having them. On the basis of this fact, they place man's moral responsibility, and ground all their arguments and persuasives to obedience. It is this fact which makes them say, that man has natural power to obey God. This fact is their proof; or rather, it is the very thing itself. The possession of the human faculties, is the possession of power. To have these faculties and not to have them, makes as great a difference, in respect to ability to obey God, as having the use of eyes, and not having it, makes, in reference to power to see. Thus far their preaching is well, and meets a response from every man's breast. Men, notwithstanding the fall, are still men,—men, and not brutes,—sane men, and not maniacs :



hence, unquestionably, their accountableness; hence the eternal retributions of reward or punishment which await them; and, I say not *hence*, but *herein*, their power, as well to obey as disobey their Maker.

But let us proceed with the preaching before us: it compels our approbation still further. As it makes a distinction between ability and inclination, in reference to obeying God, *it never loses sight* of that distinction in its pleadings and remonstrances with mankind. It makes man strictly voluntary in all his disobedience; voluntary in every stage of his progress; voluntary in the first act, and voluntary in the last; voluntary on earth, and voluntary also in hell. What if one has become obdurate, nay, even desperate in sin: he is, on that account, none the less voluntary. Habit never can become fate; despair itself can do nothing more than make the rebellious spirit more determined, more voluntarily set, in rebellion. Man sinning, in common and under all circumstances, is man willing or choosing to sin,—freely exercising power which fits him equally to obey or disobey God, in disobeying him. This is

what makes a state of confirmed sinning so unspeakably appalling,—worse than death,—worse than (apart from this) eternal perdition itself. Here, according to this preaching, is the chief horror of the world of woe. And is it not, in this respect also, as it should be? Should it not be always open-eyed to the common-sense distinction, between ability and perverseness; or does that distinction vanish as men advance in guilt; or is it lost in any depth of crime into which a man may plunge himself? Doubtless it remains, while man remains man, and is as vital and as essential in the world of despair, as in the world of hope and mercy. Should a man, with perfect muscular power and freedom to use it, refuse to use it, in loco-motion; should he place himself on a seat, with a purpose not to move; should he sit there to-day, and to-morrow, and until he dies; his power to move himself remaining in him to the last, and nothing hindering him from moving, but an invincible determination to the contrary; such a man, in respect to the power of self-loco-motion, is not what a helpless paralytic is, who lies passively on his couch, till death

terminates his sufferings : there is to the very last a difference, nay, all the difference, between a suicide and one who dies in the course and by the irresistible necessity of nature. Equally radical is the difference in all conceivable, all possible circumstances, between a creature who has no rational faculties, and one who has them, but will not use them in obeying his Maker. And I cannot but approve of this way of preaching, in so far as it holds forth this difference in its full magnitude, and in all its legitimate results and bearings.

It is yet further deserving of approbation. As man, according to its estimate of him, is in all circumstances a creature with a will ; that is, as he never ceases to be a *responsible* man, it *therefore* makes him inexcusable for not meeting his responsibilities. It holds him to his obligations, and condemns him for violating them, simply because he has the physical powers requisite to the discharge of them. Were nothing else true of him, all his delinquencies would be indefensible. It dwells, indeed, upon whatever aggravates his guilt ; but it finds the basis of guilt back

of all aggravating circumstances, in the mere fact, that he is a man,—a responsible being. If his circumstances have been favorable and encouraging, his demerit is thereby made greater; but irrespectively of all circumstances, all gracious aid, he is without excuse, on the ground that he has the natural parts and attributes of a human creature, and knows, or might know, his duty. This I think right. It is scriptural: it is doing as the apostle has done, Rom. i: 20, where he pronounces the idolatrous Gentiles inexcusable, because the true God is clearly apprehensible by the human faculties, from the glorious workmanship of his hands. It perfectly agrees also with human consciousness, and the law written in the heart of man. Preaching, which fails to do this, makes a prime mistake; begins in error, and if consistent with itself, will vitiate and pervert the entire gospel: nothing being plainer than that—if men are not bound to obey God, and inexcusable for disobedience, independently of their abuse of grace,—grace is no more grace, gospel no more gospel.

Thus far the preaching under considera-

tion proceeds, justly, in its positions and enforcements respecting human ability. It is with regret that I cannot concur with it perfectly. It is painful to find any fault with the best of all the ways of preaching, in respect to this vital subject, that, as far as I know, have prevailed since the days of inspiration. In those days, controversy on this subject seems not to have arisen. Christ and his apostles enforced upon men the immediate discharge of moral obligation, without appearing embarrassed themselves with any theoretic difficulty concerning power, or appearing apprehensive that any objection of that sort would be raised by their hearers. Their manner was as free and unguarded, as is that of a man when urging his fellow-man to the performance of any civil or social duty. In after-times, philosophy, which has left unperplexed no fundamental truth in theology or morals, gave rise to noisy and fierce disputes about power and free-will. These disputes, unhappily, found their way into the pulpit, and made, as they are now making, strange confusion in the churches. The influence of philosophy on this point

was so extensively injurious, that in no instance, before the time of Edwards, within the compass of our information, has the pulpit spoken on it in a clear and consistent manner. Edwards' celebrated treatise awakened intellect into new life; and the doctrine of that treatise, illustrated and enforced by Hopkins, Bellamy, Smalley, and others, pervaded the New-England ministry, and made the pulpit of that land inferior in purity and power to none on the earth. Hence, under the divine blessing, the prevalence of revivals in America, with such unprecedented frequency, within the last half-century. I need not say, that I meant to designate the general strain of New-England preaching in relation to the subject of power, during this period, by the remarks which have just been submitted. May I now state, with great deference to names that deserve to be held in perpetual remembrance, two particulars wherein I think this preaching not absolutely faultless?

It has been common, if not universal, for the orthodox pulpit of New-England, while insisting on man's natural ability, to an-



nounce it, as an absolute certainty, that he never will obey without a sovereign intervention of *special* grace. This, unquestionably, was correct: it was but to tell the truth, and truth of the highest importance. But what is the state of an attentive, convinced mind, under such instruction? convinced at the same time, that it has natural power, and that, *left to itself*, it is as certain as its own existence that it never will exert that power. Let such a mind, then, suppose that it is *left to itself*; having nothing on which its hopes can rest, but its own natural power. Would it not, under that impression, be without all reason for exerting its power? and could any one reasonably expect that it would exert it? Yet I must submit it for reflection, whether it has not been quite usual for the pulpit to address men with the most pungent persuasives to self-exertion, in order to their salvation, on the *exclusive* ground of their having natural ability; and whether, if this be the fact, the pulpit has herein pursued the scriptural or the best course? Their having natural power, their being rational creatures, binds them indeed to be holy; and

makes their unholiness for ever inexcusable ; and this great truth should be at the basis of all pulpit-instruction. And were the object simply to make men feel their obligation, and convict them of guilt for not discharging it, enough would be done, merely by maintaining that men, notwithstanding the fall, still remain men, or retain all their rational faculties. But, as the main design of preaching is not to *convict*, but to convert and save men,—to bring them to repentance, and set them to exerting themselves in the cheerful and diligent discharge of all the duties of piety and holiness ; something more is indispensable than shutting them up to their own natural power, as the sole ground of effort. That power, however complete, should not be relied upon by preachers as a sufficient reason for action on the part of their hearers ; while it is declared by the former, and believed, as it should be, by the latter, that it never was and never will be exerted efficiently without a supernatural intervention of grace. Whatever be the ground of this certainty, the influence of it upon the hearers, if accredited by them, must, if eve-

ry thing be excluded from their thoughts but the fact that they possess natural power, produce despair, which is fatal to effort. Should any thing obviously out of all probability, not to say out of reason, be expected of mankind or by preachers of the saving grace of God?

Will it now be said, that men have never been designedly thrown upon their mere natural power, to fulfil the requisitions of the pulpit? I should rejoice to think that the fact is so; but if it be, I cannot forbear asking, what mean those bold demands for immediate repentance, from men, on the ground of their having natural power, which have been so common? Would it not be surprising, if any one should deny that demands for repentance have been and are enforced, not at all by the consideration that men may hope for the renewing grace of God, in exerting themselves, as they necessarily must in order to repent; but simply because they have natural power to repent if they would? All mention of the divine mercy is not indeed omitted: forgiveness, it is declared, shall follow repentance; but as for repentance itself,

that is the duty of the sinner, and to the performance of that duty he is urged, on the ground of his having natural power, by the tremendous sanction of eternal justice, but not *encouraged*, by fostering in him the hope, that, in earnestly exerting himself, in order to perform his duty, divine grace may secure a happy result. Exertions, *in order* to come to repentance, are not, I suppose, generally approved. Nay, have they not been specifically condemned by those, for instance, who inhibit *trying*,\* and must, even before trying, have the very thing itself? The duty must be done; the duty itself, *in contra-distinction to pre-requisite effort*, must be done this very second, and done just because it is *duty*, and can be done if there is but a willing mind. The want of this willingness, the specific and sole difficulty in the case, is left as (which

\* "How," it has been often asked, "can one *try* to love, repent, etc.? He must *do* the thing, not try to do it." What, I answer, is trying to do a thing, but making effort to do it? Can there be no mental exertion, in order to the production of a right moral state in the mind? The mind cannot will itself directly into such a state, but it can (see onward in the text,) *exert itself in order* to that result.

indeed it is) a most aggravated sin, under stern reprobation; without mention of any means to be used in overcoming it. Though it is not more certain, that God's word is true, than that this unwillingness will never cease, if renewing grace do not intervene; the sinner, instead of being encouraged to exert himself, in hope of that gracious intervention, is simply challenged to the performance of the duty, with a memento that he can perform it if he will, and must perform it, or perish. He is environed by warnings against one moment's delay, while the adamant chain of despair is fixed upon him, (unless he secretly indulge hope on other ground,) by the announcement of the certainty above mentioned, and by his being at the same time shut up to his own mere natural power. This is his situation; and it has been represented as, in a certain view, a favorable one. It is favorable, many think, to the sinner's being at length brought to a surrender of himself to the Divine disposal. The duty of repentance binding upon him; the discharge of that duty enforced by motives infinitely terrible; yet thrown upon bare na-

tural power, and reminded, that he never will, of himself, use that power: what, it has been asked, is the tendency of a sense of these most serious facts? If the sinner feels that they are realities, will he not be apt, in something like a fit of self-desperation, to throw himself into the hands of God, as the only possible way of escaping infinite ruin? I do not deny that he will. Undoubtedly, many persons have, under these views and apprehensions, though not these alone, submitted themselves to the Divine Will. But it does not hence follow, that the best or even proper means, have been employed, on the part of preachers, to bring about that result. Let it not be overlooked that the specific mediate influence which, under God's agency, induces submission in such cases, is exactly that which the preaching in question, at the juncture contemplated, omits to enforce, as a motive to submission. The sinner submits himself to the disposal of a good and merciful God, because he sees that he is good and merciful, and that no other door of hope for his soul remains. What, now, if even that door were closed? The



only influence which touches his natural power, and starts it into exercise, is taken away ; and must he not either die in despair, or, reckless of consequences, abandon himself to his old life of sin ? This influence, be it remembered, forms no part of that which is directly exerted upon him by the preaching of which we speak. It does not encourage the sinner to effort by the fact, that there is a renewing Spirit among mankind, and that *therefore* effort may not be unsuccessful. The sinner knows, indeed, that there is a renewing Spirit, and he is kept, by this knowledge, from despair, and induced by it, at length, under divine influence, to forsake a life of impenitence, and give his heart to God. But the preaching before us does not urge this consideration, as a ground of the present practicability of duty. It contents itself with promising him pardon and salvation, on the general condition of his repenting, in the use of his natural power. It does not encourage him to effort in fulfilling that condition, by the prospect, or even the possibility, of his being aided by the Spirit in making the effort.

Herein, then, I would humbly express the opinion, that there is some room for improvement in what I suppose to have been the best mode of preaching, in reference to the present point, which has prevailed among us. It differs, I think, in this particular, from the scriptural mode. The Scriptures give this mode full sanction, in so far as they condemn disobedience, simply because men have natural power to obey, and inculcate nothing short of immediate repentance, and make no allowance for delay ; but the Scriptures nowhere, to my understanding, urge men to exert natural power to repent, or perform any other duty, *merely* because they have that power. That they have it, is assumed in their being called upon to exert it ; but they are called upon to exert it, not *merely* because they have it ; since that consideration, *of itself alone*, leaves the sinner in despair, when it is absolutely certain, and known to be certain, that without the intervention of divine grace, it never has availed, and never will avail. The Scriptures are ever more *in earnest* in their appeals and enforcements. They show no zeal where, hu-

manly speaking, hope of success would be preposterous. They plainly assure men, that, left to themselves, they would never change their sinful life ; but they leave them no warrant to conclude, that *they are left to themselves* ; and this is their all-comprehending ground of encouragement to exertion. They declare, that there is a renewing Spirit abroad among men ; and they declare this, not as a cold, abstract truth, but as opening a door of hope to a *depraved* race ; and the entire drift and bearing of all their persuasives, is, to awaken and move men to right action, in view of the new-creating and sanctifying influence of this gracious agent. They every where represent this Spirit as present in the world, and as striving with mankind ; and their voice summarily is, Resist not the Holy Ghost ; grieve not the Spirit ; quench not, vex not, the holy Spirit of God. This, if I mistake not, is the burden and scope of all scriptural exhortation, however variously expressed.

Whether the appeal comes from the fact of man's ruin or a Saviour's love, from time or eternity, from hell or from heaven, here is

its drift: and the scope and influence of the whole economy of redemption fall in with it; every thing conspires to induce dying man to transfer his expectation from himself and all creatures, to that Almighty Spirit, who can renew him in the likeness of his Maker. Assuredly, any preaching which would set him to self-exertion, simply on the ground of his having natural power, is, so far forth, unconsistant with the voice of scripture.

The other imperfection, or what I suppose to be such, in the preaching under our notice, has a close affinity with that which has just been remarked on. *It allows no place for effort, preliminary to the very act of duty itself.* In other words, it allows of no acts of thought or consideration, previous to the decisive act of the will. This, after what we have before considered, is not surprising. Assuming the expediency of requiring men to exert their natural power to repent, simply because of their having that power, while, notwithstanding their having it, it is one of the published oracles of God, that they never will exert it; no wonder that it does not seem inexpedient to require them to exert

it, without allowing them to use *any means in order* to do the thing prescribed. If the pulpit may enjoin the performance of what, with the same voice, it declares there is no sufficient reason for attempting, what other liberties may it not take with the immutable laws of rational agency? Whatever natural power a man may possess, he cannot act rationally without a reason: and if the doing of what there is no motive for doing, may be urged, so, in perfect consistency, may be the doing of it, *in a manner* in which, manifestly, it cannot be done. In such a manner have men been often required by the pulpit to exert their natural power to repent. All exertion, all occupation of the mind, in order to repent, has been explicitly or constructively forbidden, and previously thereto, the direct origination of a repentant state of mind peremptorily demanded. "Repent, repent this very instant: we say not *try* to repent, or exercise thought in order to repent, but instantly repent." Such a strain has been so familiar, especially in seasons of revival, that I almost tremble to express a suspicion of its not being precisely correct.

Yet I do respectfully venture to ask, whether it be consonant, either with the laws of mind, or with Scripture? Is it, then, possible for the human mind to repent in the manner here demanded, that is, *without exerting itself appropriately in order to repent*? Can the thing possibly be done? If so, in no other way, surely, than by the mind's *direct* determination or volition. But now, suppose the preacher's demand so far met, that the volition has been formed: the mind, at the challenge of the pulpit, instantly resolves; but is that resolution repenting? Is it passing from a rebellious to a subdued, softened, contrite, heavenly temper of heart? At best, is it any thing more than the mind's committing or pledging itself, that the thing required shall take place as soon as in the nature of the case it can? What, beyond this, can the mind do by such a resolution? Can it instantly throw itself, at will, into any given state of affection or feeling? Can it, by mere volition, directly originate in itself love, hatred, sorrow, joy, or any other sentiment whatever? Since man was created on the earth, has such a thing been done? It is



more than a miracle ; it is an impossibility. As a man cannot love without loving something, or have any sentiment in the absence of its appropriate object, the introduction of the object into his thoughts, is, in the first place, indispensable to his being exercised with the sentiment. A man, in order to love God, must have God in his thoughts ; in order to hate sin, must think of sin ; and if he must think of the object, at least, in order to have the given feeling, the pulpit should not forbid such preliminary mental occupation, but demand, and by every appropriate means, stimulate and encourage it.

This preaching, though correct in its general position in respect to human power, will, in the particular under our notice, be found, upon examination, to proceed upon a radical mistake as to the natural capacities of the mind. The mind does not possess the specific power which it requires it to exert,—the power to put itself directly, or by mere volition, into a repentant state. It has all the natural power or faculties requisite to repentance, but no faculty whereby it can repent *in such a manner* : and to demand

repentance *in that manner*, is not less unreasonable than it would be to require a blind man to see, or a dead man to perform the functions of a living one. It is to demand what no man can, in any sense whatever, do, and what no miracle could make him do.

If it now be asked, whether I am not denying the obligation to *immediate* repentance? I answer, by no means; unless the term immediate be used in this case absurdly. If by immediate repentance is meant, repentance without even thinking, let me be understood as opposing it; but if it import, that nothing must precede that occupation of the mind which is indispensable to repentance, and nothing intervene\* between such an occupa-

\* If an impenitent man be not thinking of God, he should this moment admit him into his thoughts. If he be seriously thinking of him, he must be conscious of an influence from the object of his thought, which, if he does not resist, will not allow him to continue any longer in a rebellious course of life. If he does not yield himself up to that influence, if he sets himself against it, even for an instant; if he does not fall before it at once, as though it were impossible to be resisted; he does not meet the divine requisition, as I think it should be enforced from the pulpit. The least hesitation or wavering, whether it arise from the thought of idols which must be renounced, or sacrifices which must be made, or dif-

tion and the result it contemplates, then I claim to be thought in favor of immediate repentance. Undoubtedly, all men should love God immediately; that is, do whatever is implied in loving God without any delay,—do it instantly; and thus, as to repenting of sin, and every other modification of love, or instance of obedience. But if a distinction be made, between loving God, and what is indispensable in order to loving him, and the design of the epithet *immediate* be to exclude the latter, then do I pronounce the requisition of the former, the requisition of an absolute impossibility.

And as this preaching, in the respect in question, does not conform itself to the essential nature of the human mind, neither is it conformed to, or countenanced by, Scripture. To say, that Scripture calls upon men to repent immediately, is to say nothing to the purpose; unless it can be shown, that, in repentance, Scripture makes the exact distinction between the mind's actual repenting,

difficulties which must be encountered, or from any other cause, should be condemned as rebellion against light and conviction, and as perilous in a high degree to the soul.

and the mental operation preparatory thereto, and designedly excludes and forbids the latter. This distinction, certainly, being nowhere made in Scripture, it is begging the question, to apply proof-texts in favor of a requisition which pre-supposes its having been made. It is begging the question, and that for the purpose, as I have shown, of making Scripture responsible for requiring of mankind an impossible and an absurd thing. The voice of Scripture is every where in favor of instantaneous repentance. The sinner who delays his return to God, even for one moment, does this in resistance to a thousand explicit commands, a thousand most solemn admonitions, and the whole tenor and spirit of the Bible. But will any one take upon himself to represent the Bible as forbidding men even to think before repenting; or, in other words, to repent, without directing the mind to those objective facts and considerations which must of necessity be in the mind's view whenever repentance takes place? When the Bible calls upon men to repent immediately, it calls upon them to perform without delay whatever mental ex-

ercises are necessarily implied in repenting, and not the specific act itself of repenting, apart from, and exclusive of, all pre-requisite mental action. That this is the fact, is evident, not only from the very nature of things, but also from the methods which Scripture employs to induce men to comply with its loud and perpetual call to repentance. For surely it does not, in that standing call, require men to exercise repentance in a different manner from that which they are set upon, by its various persuasives to obedience to that call. If it would be sin in men to apply their minds to the consideration of those things which are suited to produce repentance, in order to beget a penitent spirit within them, would the Scripture, in order to accomplish the same end, set those things before their minds, and enforce them upon their reflection and feelings, with a pathos and an eloquence to which there is no parallel? Can the Scripture be accessory to men's sinning? Yet, how does the Scripture proceed in dealing with the human mind, in order to its recovery from the practice and power of sin? It observes most perfectly



the laws of that mind. Recognizing the fact, that the will has no *direct* control over the affections, and cannot produce them in the mind but by fixing thought on their appropriate objects, it presents these objects, and urges them upon attention, with all possible earnestness of persuasion. It does not content itself with presenting the command, and asserting authority, and submitting the alternative of repentance or perdition. This it does; and more than this, it need not to have done, had its design been simply to make men acquainted with the true state of their case. But its design goes far beyond this: it is infinitely merciful; a mighty compassion speaks in the Bible; the actual recovery and salvation of men is aimed at; and every thing is directed and pursued, to bring about this result. Hence such strains of tenderness, as well as terror, as those of Scripture, can nowhere else be found. Every principle of our rational and immortal nature is appealed to. We are surrounded by whatever can stimulate our hope; whatever can move our gratitude; whatever can soften the rigor of our hearts; whatever can elicit



the tears of contrition ; whatever can ennoble, elevate, expand, and purify the feelings of the mind : and all, in order to bring us to repentance. So deals the Bible with men. These are the methods which it employs to induce obedience to its high demand for repentance. Why should not men be encouraged to employ like methods with themselves ? Why should all preliminary thought, all stirring up of the mind in order to repent, be held unlawful ; and the act of repenting, detached from the mental exercises which are necessary to its performance, be insisted upon, as the thing to be done first of all,—that which must precede, not follow, all thought and reflection upon the objects which alone can produce repentance ?

The testimony of Scripture against works done before repentance, cannot be justly adduced against such preliminary mental exercises. It is not testimony against, but for, these exercises. They are not, in the sense of Scripture, works before repentance ; they are self-evidently included in repentance itself, as required by Scripture ; and thus, all the calls of Scripture to immediate repent-

ance, are testimonies in favor of them. If a man should set himself to the performance of *a thing in itself sinful*,\* or to produce within his breast some impure feeling, he would be undertaking one of the works of impenitence; and his setting himself to the business, as well as the execution of the business itself, would be to despise the whole counsel and authority of God. But when a man, hearing the voice of God, which calls him to repentance, undertakes to meet that

\* And praying itself is sin, if not undertaken as an instance of true obedience, an exercise of holiness. One who sets himself to praying, without meaning it as equivalent to repentance, or as though praying did not imply and include repenting, sets himself to the performance of what is in itself sinful, and contrary to the law of God. Instruction from the pulpit, which does not make it as difficult to pray, or read the Scriptures, or perform any other duty, aright, as it is to repent and believe the gospel, has no warrant, surely, from the word of God, and tends fatally to mislead and deceive the hearers. Men should be taught to obey God in every thing, and to do every thing in such a manner, that, when it is done, they shall not be left in a state of sin, and momentarily exposed to destruction. The sinner should be directed to put himself at once to the exercise of love to God, in view of what God is; to the exercise of repentance, in view of what sin is: knowing, that in this way, and in this way only, he may, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, become a penitent child of God.

call in the only way in which it can possibly be met, he is doing nothing, surely, which can be fairly condemned, as a work done, or attempted, before repentance. There is, as it appears to us, no room for a question as to the *morality* of his procedure. He must not, because dependent on the Holy Spirit, wait in unconcern, or make no exertion. He must meet his Maker's authoritative call to repentance; and he cannot do this without exerting himself to that end, in the manner which has been mentioned.

The foregoing remarks on what I think at least questionable modes of managing this very important subject, embrace in their just scope all that I have to subjoin, as to what appears to me the true way. It may be the duty of preachers, sometimes, to give this subject a formal and thorough examination in the pulpit. To say, that no precedent for such an examination of it can be found in Scripture, is to allege nothing against that course; unless no discretion be given to the preachers, as to methods of procedure in the application of general principles, under their ever-varying circumstances. Such a discre-

tion all preachers have ; and their usefulness, in a high degree, depends on their wisdom in using it. The Bible gives them no example of a regular argument on human power ; and yet, *in principle*, the Bible might be found to condemn them, if, in certain circumstances, they should decline entering on such an argument. Is it certain that Paul, who has such close and copious arguments on justification, in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians, and, on the passing away of the Jewish ritual, in the epistle to the Hebrews, would have shunned a logical examination of our subject, if a state of things in respect to it, easily conceivable, had existed in his day ?

Should a preacher then, deem himself called by Providence, as possibly he may be, to give this subject a complete pulpit discussion, I have virtually said already what positions, in relation to it, I think he should take. He would misrepresent Scripture, and shock the common consciousness of mankind, if, because the Bible affirms, as it constantly does, that men cannot obey God, he should insist, that in every sense whatever, they have no power to obey him. Men have



rational faculties : these are *powers* by which, in the presence of evidences of the divine glory, they are physically capacitated, and *therefore* they are under obligation to love and serve their Maker. These powers, being in the strict sense natural to man, I would, speaking of them collectively, term his *natural powers* : and as it is these which constitute his essential likeness to his Maker, they should not, in the discussion, be made a small matter, but should be magnified as the very basis of obligation and accountableness, which, while man endures, be his abode where and in what circumstances it may, will leave his sin without excuse, and justify his condemnation and punishment. I would shun most heedfully, every assumption as to this point, which directly or indirectly interferes with the entire *freeness* of the grace of God ; and make the primary ground of man's guilt, not the abuse of that grace, but the misuse of the powers of a rational and moral agent. Thus would the way be prepared to introduce advantageously the gracious provisions and influences of the gospel. If man, irrespectively of these, be guilty, how

aggravated does his guilt appear, when he is viewed, as in the midst of them all, persisting in his rebellion against God! The enhancement of obligation arising from grace, and consequently of guilt arising from contempt of that grace, should be urged with all the earnestness which these important facts demand: and yet I would now announce the absolute, awful certainty, that all mankind, from the wilfulness of their depravity, if left to themselves, would ever have cleaved to their sinful ways, even in the midst of the best privileges of the christian dispensation. In establishing this fact, which, were it not for the presence in our world of a renewing and sanctifying Spirit, would throw the pall of despair over the race, I would bring forth those faithful witnesses from Scripture which declare, that men, as dead in sins, and enemies in their minds by wicked works, and enslaved to the world, *cannot* come to Christ, or be subject to the law of God. And thus would I throw light on *the nature* of this *cannot*, and lead them to censure and condemn themselves chiefly, on this very account. But as the object is not to plunge them



into despair, I would here seize upon the fact, that there is a renewing Spirit, as the sole hope of man, and press it along with the certainty before mentioned, as the grand argument for exertion. The object of exertion should be specifically set forth, as nothing short of actual repentance and obedience; and all the powers of persuasion should expend themselves in stimulating the mind to exert itself to that end; but this should be done with clear instruction as to the manner in which exertion should be made, so as to preclude, if possible, every vain effort to accomplish the result, in a way incompatible with the laws of the human mind. Attention should be directed to the appropriate objects of holy feeling; but no delay should be allowed; the mind's instantaneous surrender to the influence of those objects, should be strenuously insisted on; the appalling guilt of resisting that influence, under a direct and vivid consciousness of it, should be urged; and the mind's self-surrendry be encouraged by the consideration, that in proportion to the decision and promptness with which it now acts, the prospect increases,

that the Spirit of grace will make the result sure. If the result does take place, the whole praise of it should be given to the Spirit, without whose influence nothing would have been done. If it does not take place, the blame of failure should be ascribed wholly to the sinner's own perverseness and obstinacy of heart.

There is no subject on which popular discourse should be more perspicuous than on this; and to this end preachers should, on this point, be careful to hold true and consistent principles; and make themselves perfectly acquainted with those principles. But on ordinary occasions, it would be well, doubtless, to avoid, as much as possible, metaphysical statements and technical expressions. Very often, instead of endeavoring to prove, or expressly affirming, that men have *natural power*, let this be taken for granted; for men know of themselves, better than we can teach them, that in every instance in which they do wrong, they might have done otherwise; and this is all which is meant by their having natural power. Again, instead of saying, that men are *morally un-*

*able* to obey God, let them be represented as loving supremely other objects, and, for that reason, invincibly averse to their Maker: and when it is said that they *cannot* love him, let the design of such language manifestly be, to express this aversion with its guilty grounds. No one can seriously read any passage of the Bible, wherein it is declared that men cannot repent, without seeing at once that its purpose is not to affirm a physical impossibility, but in popular and appropriate language, to testify to the wickedness of man; and so to show him what reason he has for the deepest concern about his soul. Thus, what is meant by moral inability is inculcated, and no difficulty seems to encumber the momentous truth.

Preaching on this subject should always proceed with a vigilant regard to the fact before remarked on, that men have no power to will themselves directly into prescribed states of feeling. I greatly misjudge, if want of just attention to this fact, on the part of preachers, be not the chief occasion of the prevailing complaints and contradictions in respect to inability. I do not say, that

the people should, on ordinary occasions, be distinctly told that the will has no direct control over feeling ; but preachers should carefully remember this important law of the human mind, in doing the business of persuasion. If, instead of repeating the bare demand for immediate repentance, they would affectionately and skilfully engage the attention of their hearers to the moving facts and considerations, in view of which, repentance, whenever it occurs, is exercised, they would probably forestall the excuse of inability, either by inducing repentance, or by begetting in them a sense of the desperate obstinacy and hardness of their hearts. This is the manner of the Bible ; and hence it is not often that we hear complaints of inability, as arising from impressions made by the serious reading of that book. It does not appear that there is any necessity of our being much longer troubled by such complaints. We are accustomed to meet with no case more troublesome than that of the convinced man, who, under a most pungent sense of danger and guilt declares, *that he fain would love God if he*

*could* ; but I think that this case would be found quite manageable, by observing, in the treatment of it, the known principles of mental operation and feeling. There is no reason to question the sincerity of many who make that declaration. They do, in some sense, desire to love God, but they cannot feel the affection of love to him by merely desiring to do so ; and they take no other way. No wonder that they are conscious of perfect inability ; they are conscious of what is a reality, as I have shown. Let the minds of such persons be diverted from attempting an impossibility, by engaging them in calm and fixed thought on the objective causes of holy love. Here let the preacher's right hand show its cunning. Let him prove himself a skilful workman, in bringing forth the evidences of the Divine goodness, and displaying the motives to the love and service of God. In this way of proceeding, he may hope for the concurrence of the Holy Spirit. Or, if he does not succeed in awakening gracious feeling in the breasts of the persons he has to do with, he will probably silence their complaints, by convincing

them, that their desire to love God is a desire to love Him and the world at one and the same time.



## VIII.

### HOW TO REPENT.

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THE hearers of the gospel are often disposed to ask, when the obligation to immediate repentance is urged upon them, *how are we to repent?* a question which we ought not to be unprepared to meet, and which we should meet, not with reprehension, but instruction and counsel. The prophet Hosea, chap. v. 4, has, I think, clearly shown the true answer to that question. He there teaches that the way of repenting or turning to God, is to *frame one's doings to that end*: an expression of which an explanation seems needless. Universally, when men would accomplish any thing requiring the use of means, they frame their doings, or direct and order their conduct to

the proposed end ; and the same, the prophet takes it for granted as a matter understood and unquestionable, is the way to repent or turn to God.

In order, however, to present this subject in a just and proper light, I would first show, notwithstanding the prophet's clear assumption of the point, that there is a way of repenting as well as of doing other things ; secondly, declare that way, or how a man's doings must be framed in order to repent ; and, thirdly, vindicate the doctrine which I shall advance, against objections.

I. There is a way to repent. Repenting is something to be done in the use of means and endeavors, and not otherwise.

Repenting, or turning to God, is a state of mind which a man cannot bring himself into by one mere volition. He cannot repent simply by resolving or saying within himself, *I will repent*. That resolution may fix his mind on repenting, and be the beginning of a series of mental acts and exercises which will result in his repentance ; but his repentance is not its immediate sequent, any more than a man's becoming pleased or pensive,

or affected in any way, is the immediate result of a volition to become so affected. If a man determine that he will be in any frame of mind whatsoever, he does not find himself in that frame as soon as he forms the determination ; he finds himself using the means—the necessary volitions and exertions, in order to get himself into it : he finds his thoughts and affections employed about those objects which have a tendency to produce the desired frame : in this way, and not otherwise, he fulfils his purpose. If a man would revive in his heart a lively affection for an absent friend, the affection does not instantly glow in his breast as the immediate effect of his volition ; it may exist there very quickly, but not until he has given some thoughts to the absent person's image and excellencies. Thus it is in respect to repentance : it cannot be experienced by the mind in any other way than by the mind's action and exercise towards those things which have a tendency to produce repentance. These are the things the mind must address itself unto and employ itself about, in fulfilling the obligation to repent and turn to God. If a man, when

commanded to repent, would obey that command, these are the things he undertakes in order to obey it; for in the nature and necessity of the case, it cannot be obeyed in any other way.—We are sometimes much in earnest when we are urging men to immediate repentance, to obtain from them a promise to do what we press upon them; but if they give us a promise, it amounts only to this, that they will employ their minds about those awful and holy objects of which repentance in the soul is the impress and counterpart. And, perhaps, if instead of exacting a promise, we would give our whole labor to the business of making these objects stand out before them in their grand importance and excellence, we should be more likely to gain our point.

Perhaps these observations may be regarded by some in the light of mere assertions: to myself, they are full of evidence; and I cannot but think they must appear so to all who will give them due consideration. It strikes me as hardly needing more than correct statement to produce conviction, that the mind, to be justly affected by things

without itself, must have those things present to its thoughts and contemplations; and I have only been inculcating this principle in respect to repenting or turning to God. All I have said is, that in order to repent, the objects that work repentance in the mind must be thought of and considered;—that this is truly the way to repent—and can any one doubt it? If testimony from Scripture be demanded, many other passages besides that of our prophet are explicit. David shows us that there is a way to repent, and to some extent what that way is, when he says “I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto thy testimonies :” and Ezekiel, in chap. xviii: 28, “Because he considereth and turneth away from his wickedness, he shall save his soul alive.”

II. There is then a way to repent, and that way has been vaguely brought into view. But here more precision and care are necessary, and therefore I have proposed it as a distinct topic, to show what a man must do in order to repent.

I have said he must employ his mind about those things which have a tendency to in-

duce its repentance. Let this condensed view of the course to be pursued be justly expanded, and the way to repent will be fully understood.

What then are those things which have a tendency to bring a man to repentance, or without which his repentance is an impossibility? Here it is obvious that men, being in different circumstances, and having shades of difference in character, are not all under a necessity to pass through the same process of acts and exercises in order to their reformation and recovery to God. A heathen man cannot come to repentance without a knowledge of the true God, and of the vanity and wickedness of idolatry. He must, therefore, use the means of acquiring that knowledge, as those who are endeavoring to win his soul must use the means of imparting it to him. An infidel cannot repent while he remains an infidel, nor a heretic while he remains a heretic; the one must renounce his unbelief, and the other his error; and must do whatever is necessary to such renunciation; and much honest and serious research into the evidences of the truth may be necessary, if,



as doubtless has been the case with some, they are sincerely convinced, and deeply rooted in their false and fatal opinions. An immoral man cannot repent while he continues to be unchaste, or dishonest, or intemperate, or profane; the mind is incapable of exercising repentance while it remains the slave of such flagitious propensities and habits. A man addicted to any vicious practice whatsoever must forsake that evil way, or continue an impenitent and perishing sinner.

But the abjuration of gross delusions and sins, though indispensable, is not sufficient. This must be done, and something else also, or the soul will never come to the turning point of its salvation. Repenting, or actually turning to God, supposes in the soul a lively and commanding perception of God's supreme excellency; but the soul cannot acquire such a perception without apprehending and considering the proofs and manifestations of the Divine Nature in creation, providence and Scripture; that is, without deeply searching after God, in his works and his word, where alone he is to be found.—Again,

repentance supposes the renunciation of the world as the chief good; since it is impossible that both the world and God should be embraced as the chief good at the same time; but how can the world be renounced without a deep conviction of its vanity, and how can that conviction be obtained but by reflecting on its character, and comparing it with the soul's everlasting need? The action of the mind in thus reflecting and comparing, may be too quick to be discerned, but of its necessity as a means of repentance there cannot be a question.—Repentance also implies sorrow for sin, its essence being love for Him against whom all sin is committed, and whose glory and government it aims to destroy; but to be grieved for sin, its turpitude must be seen, and how can it be seen but by exercising the mind on those things wherein the evil of sin appears.—Repentance in persons indoctrinated in the gospel, supposes, moreover, cordial acquiescence in the principles of the oracles of God, the truths of Christianity, the christian rule of life, the terms of saving mercy, and all the revealed prescriptions and enactments of the

divine administration ; and without employing the mind about these subjects, how is it possible intelligently and truly to acquiesce in them ?

III. But my position will be further explained when, as proposed, thirdly, I shall have answered some objections.

It may be objected that we give license to sin by allowing that any thing may be done before repentance. But if nothing is allowed to be done which is not in order to repentance, and without which repentance would be an impossibility, then such allowance, instead of being a license to sin, is but the necessary means of deliverance from sin. Besides, can that be evil which has a direct tendency to good ? Can that be unlawful without which duty cannot be done ? Can that be contrary to the commandment which is absolutely necessary in order to the fulfilling of the commandment ? Nay, the commandment itself includes and requires it. Universally and necessarily, when a command to do something is given, the things indispensable to the doing of the main thing are as much required as the main thing it-

self. When a master commands a servant to perform an errand, he commands him to use whatever means may be necessary to its performance. When an instructor commands a pupil to learn a lesson, he requires at the same time all the pre-requisite conning and seclusion. This is so evident, that no argument could make it more certain. It is equally evident, that when God commands repentance, he commands also whatever may be indispensable to repentance. So that, when a sinner considers his ways, and turns away from them, and meditates on the evil of sin as a transgression against God, and calls to mind the infinite claims of God to his supreme love, and does all this in order to, and as included in, true repentance, he is not rebelling against the commandment, but falling in with its scope and intention.

Our doctrine may appear to some persons as tending to self-righteousness, by setting men to strive in the exercise of their own strength; whereas the gospel cuts off all hope at once from this quarter, and binds men to come instantly to Christ. But what is it for a sinner to come immediately to

Christ? Let those answer who make this objection to our doctrine. Is there not some movement of mind, some mental act or operation, necessary in order to his coming? I insist upon nothing to be done before his coming, but as in order, and absolutely indispensable to it. I do not plead for any thing in itself sinful, as I have shown: I would not set the sinner on a course of self-righteous doings; but by all the motives of eternity, I would dissuade him against such a course; and urge him in the opposite direction, by binding him to the performance of those things, and only those, which have a direct tendency to bring him to repentance. There is a distinction between self-righteous doings, and those which our doctrine defends, as broad as the difference between the way to hell and the way to holiness. When sinners are directed to do things admitted to be, in their very nature, sinful, they are directed to pursue a course utterly unfavorable to their repentance. When, admitting their excuse for continued disobedience, they are told to wait God's time for converting them, in the use of formal or legal prayers, etc. they are



set forward on the road to entire infatuation and destruction. But when they are urged to arouse themselves to the immense concerns of their souls, and employ their minds and hearts about the great objective causes of repentance and salvation, they are not urged to any thing sinful, but to things which, though not holy in themselves, are, as the means of holiness, of indispensable importance.

It may be deemed an objection to our doctrine that it admits of some delay in the infinite concern of repentance, whereby the soul is left exposed, and may perish. But it does not admit of any, even the least, delay. If a servant is commanded to do a thing, and he instantly betakes himself to the use of the only means by which it can be done, is he delaying, or does the command which requires of him the immediate use of these means, encourage, or even tolerate delay? Our doctrine recognizes the obligation, and inculcates the duty, of *immediate* repentance. No repentance can be conceived more immediate than that which it enforces. It requires a man to repent as



quickly as in the nature of the case it can be done. A man cannot set himself to the business of repenting without employing his mind about the things which have a tendency to beget repentance. A doctrine which urges him to an instant occupation of his mind about these things, urges him to the speediest way of repenting. If repentance were a thing to be done without any such occupation of the mind, the objection would be valid; but not, surely, since the fact is otherwise.

Besides, the appearance of delay in the objector's view probably arises from some misconception of the nature of the preliminary process. It is not a process of *selfish* exercises, prescribed on the supposition of insuperable difficulty, as a means of procuring divine grace to remove it. It is not a sinful waiting for the Spirit, in formal or selfish praying, reading, etc. To plead for the necessity of such a process were indeed to be opposed to immediate repentance; but as I have shown, such is not the nature of the acts and exercises of the mind which are preliminary and indispensable to repentance. They are

acts not sinful ; and though in the order of nature *previous* to repentance, they are not necessarily previous by any distinguishable distance of time. Repentance ought to ensue upon them instantaneously. As soon as the man thinks upon his ways, he ought to forsake them. Thought, previously, is admissible merely because they cannot be forsaken without it. As soon as he turns his mind upon the evidences of the evil of sin and the goodness of God, he ought to be ashamed and humbled and broken-hearted. Not *after*, but *as soon as*: not a moment should follow : motive should prevail ; moral influence should sway the heart, as if it were almighty physical power : to resist it one instant, to resist it at all, is wilfully to thrust away the end, after coming to it in the use of the means. Our doctrine demands only that the impenitent person do not hope to repent without properly and reasonably exercising his mind to that end ; that he rouse himself up, and look about him, and behold the innumerable evils that encompass him, and the countless motives that require his immediate return to God ; and then *at once*

comply with the force of those motives. To wait with his mind open to evidence and reason is the madness of rebellion, and may be punished by a sudden stroke of the divine anger.

It may, finally, be thought an objection to the view that has now been given of this subject, that it makes the business of repenting too much like any other work or doing of the mind; and leaves no place for that special agency of the Holy Spirit which alone can change the heart. I do indeed represent the human mind as acting freely, reasonably, and according to its own proper laws, even in this high matter; and maintain that no affection ever takes place in the heart more naturally and regularly than repentance, though *the immediate effect of the Holy Spirit's agency*. I would have the mind exercise itself in a way which tends to make it penitent; which of itself ought to, and if not resisted, invariably would make it penitent: this I acknowledge—and who finds fault with it? Who would pursue any other course? Should we seek to give a direction to the mind's exercises which

*would not be favorable* to its repenting? Should we set it upon selfish exertions and strivings, a course which would lead it into stupidity or self-righteous confidence? Or should we set it upon no exertions whatever, but simply repeat the demand for repentance; refusing to give the ignorant and unthinking any further explanation or direction, as if they *could* repent without engaging their minds about the things that objectively cause repentance; as if one simple volition, or saying in thought *now we will repent*, were repenting indeed. No reflecting person can hold to this way of dealing with men.

It does not follow that the influence of the Holy Spirit is made unnecessary, because the mind is set upon a course of exercises, which, of themselves, have a tendency to repentance. Things may have a strong tendency to what, after all, owing to some hindrance or interference, may not be attained. Deep and intense consideration of sin and holiness, God and eternity, mightily tends to the mind's actually turning to God; but there may be, as there *is*, in the mind, a principle of adherence to the world, which

no motive of itself is sufficient to overcome; so that if the Holy Spirit do not lend the might of his invisible hand, the preliminary exercises, however favorable, will terminate ill. Is it asked, then, why set the mind upon these preliminary exercises rather than the way of selfish waiting, since both are alike unavailable? I answer, 1. Both are not alike sinless. 2. The latter has a tendency directly unfavorable, the former a tendency directly favorable to the mind's repentance. 3. It is more likely that the Holy Spirit will co-operate with what is not sinful and is favorable to his good work, than with what is both sinful and directly unfavorable to it. The fact that the man is dependent on the Holy Spirit, and so dependent that he never will repent but in the day of the Holy Spirit's power, that fact, therefore, is compatible with our doctrine; and need not, nay, ought not, to be suppressed. The knowledge of it will but encourage exertion. It will encourage it more than all other considerations besides. Let it enter into the man's mind, while he is pondering the vast affairs of



his soul, that the Almighty arm must be stretched out in his behalf, before his sinful heart will ever exchange the world for God; and that the probability of his having the help of that arm is greater or less, according as his mind is more or less engaged in the exercises necessary to his repentance; and he is put under the force of the mightiest of all reasons for diligence in those exercises. And thus it is, that the doctrine of man's dependence on the Spirit, rightly used in preaching, instead of leading to apathy, as it has been made to do by unskilful management, is, in the light of motive or moral influence, one of the most powerful of all the statements of revelation.

These remarks expose two errors on the subject of the means to be used by men in order to their repentance and salvation.

Some maintain that the means of repentance and regeneration are selfish praying, reading and waiting on ordinances; but the inconsistency of this way with the end to be attained cannot escape remark. Sinning certainly is not the way to repenting. No excuse for sin, in any circumstances, is ad-



mitted by God, or ought to be admitted by us, as his ambassadors. If men are saved in a course of sinning, *whatever that course be*, they are saved *against* their own endeavors, and in spite of themselves.

Some allow sinners to use no means whatever. They call upon them to repent, and then cease. As to the manner of repenting, they have no explanation to give; they know of no manner: they insist upon repentance, and warn against all exercises of mind and body, but those of repentance itself, or that flow from repentance. The reason of their doing so is, that they suppose all such exercises to be necessarily sinful; and it cannot be right to encourage sin in any case or in any way. Nor can sinning be the way to repent, or doing evil the way to do good. But it is not true that man is capable of no exercises before repentance which are not essentially and necessarily sinful. He is capable, and is, in fact, the subject of instinctive and unavoidable exercises and operations, which, in themselves, are neither sinful nor holy. All such are those which, *in the nature and necessity of*

*the case, are in order, and have a tendency to holiness.* These exercises and actions are not holy, for they are in order to holiness. Neither are they sinful, for what is sinful cannot have a *tendency* to holiness. They are *necessary, indispensable*, and that is their vindication. They are the true means of repentance.

To say that there are no means of repentance; that nothing can be done before, and in order to repentance, which is not sin; is to condemn, not the sinner's doings only, but, to a certain extent, those also of the minister of the gospel. He ought not to call the impenitent together to hear the word, for they cannot come together but in sin. He ought not to require doubting men to examine the evidences of Christianity, for that is requiring them to sin. He ought not to urge consideration on his hearers, for that too is rebellion. He cannot proceed a step in his work, as a messenger of God to sinful men, without making himself, on this supposition, the minister of sin. But he is not so in fact. The things which men must do in order to meet and hear him, and accept the

overtures of the divine mercy, are not sinful, because they are absolutely indispensable. Men *must* do these things, or remain and die in sin.

Nor are ministers only inculpated. God himself calls on perishing men to hearken to the gracious voice which, through the sacred ministry, speaketh to them from heaven, and to frame their doings to turn unto Him ; and does he necessitate men to sin as preliminary to their repentance ?



## IX.

### PREACHING CHRIST.

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ALL earnest and just discourse assumes that those to whom it is spoken, are constitutionally capable of responding and yielding to its various addresses and applications. If it reason, it assumes that they can understand an argument and may be convinced by evidence ; if it array itself in sublimity or beauty, that they are not destitute of taste ; if it is pathetic, that they may be moved with tenderness, and if terrible, with fear ; if it recommend moral excellence and enforce moral sanctions, that they are not without conscience, or necessarily insensible either to the charms of virtue or the terrors of guilt.

Although the depravity of man renders an

intervention of Divine Grace necessary to the attainment of the end aimed at by preaching, still all legitimate discourse from the pulpit, not less than secular oratory, demands in the hearers a persuasible nature, and proceeds on the assumption that its prospects of success will be proportional to the fitness and completeness of its appliances to that nature. In all its parts, it presupposes the existence of something in the physical constitution of man capable of taking a counterpart impression

A doctrine the reverse of this has sometimes been advanced. The effect of the Fall on man has been supposed to be such, that the tendency of all persuasion with reference to his immediate repentance, is and must be, to render him rather more than less repugnant to that change. Address his fears or his hopes; describe the pains of hell or the joys of heaven, the evil of sin or the excellence of virtue, the vanity of the world or the pleasures of religion; unfold to him the glories of the Divine Nature, the loveliness of the character of Christ, the riches of redeeming mercy; explore the whole field of



revealed truth, set each truth before him in its most attractive form ; and let the tongues of men and angels try their utmost strength in argument and exhortation ;—the result is, that if excited at all, anterior to the renovation of his nature by the direct agency of the Spirit, he is excited to a deadlier hostility to God and goodness.

This conclusion, which, as a general position, is set aside by innumerable facts, is supposed to be demonstrable by the following short argument : That purity and sin being contraries, and the gospel being pure and unchangeable, and man being sinful, to bring them together previous to a change on the part of man, cannot but be followed by his becoming resentful, if he be moved with feeling of any kind. But this argument confounds the difference between sin or depravity in man, and the essential constituents of his nature, as a human being : otherwise it would not represent the conjunction of the gospel with man, as necessarily a direct conjunction with his depravity, since it need not be so, provided our essential human nature as such, and our depravity, be indeed distinct things. Admitting

this distinction, we may conceive of the gospel as coming into contact with *man*, without coming into direct and violent collision with man's *moral pollution*, and as working to the displacement of the latter, in a kind and gentle way, through the intermedium of the *purely human properties*. That it is thus, in fact, that the gospel aims to recover man from the bondage of corruption, cannot be denied without dishonor to the gospel ; since, if its way be to work not through simple nature, but directly on depravity, that is, by setting depraved feeling into exercise, it must seek to save us by first making us more sinful ; or do evil that good may come.

It is neither true nor orthodox to affirm that there is nothing in apostate man beside his depravity. His fall, in Adam, divested him of his original righteousness, and inclined him to evil, but to deny that there are powers and susceptibilities of nature left within him, which, being justly appealed to by persuasion, may be set into an operation tending to, though never without the concurrence of the Spirit resulting in his recovery,

is to contradict the Scripture,\* our own observation and experience, and likewise the soundest orthodoxy.

“For whereas, both in the state of nature and the state of grace, in one whereof every man is supposed to be, there are certain heavenly sparks, suited unto each condition; the main duty of all men is to stir them up and increase them. Even in the remainders of lapsed nature, there are *cœlestes igniculi*, in notices of good and evil, accusations and apologies of conscience. These none will deny but that they ought to be stirred up and increased.†”

“I find that few are so bad as either malicious enemies, or censorious separating professors do imagine. In some, indeed, I find that human nature is corrupted into a greater likeness to devils than I once thought any on earth had been; but even in the wicked, usually, there is more for grace to make advantage of, and more to testify for God and holiness, than I once believed there had been.”‡

\* Rom. 2: 14, 15. Acts 24: 25; and 26: 28. 1. Sam. 26: 21, &c. † Dr. Owen: Works, vol. IV. pp. 143, 144.

‡ Mr. Baxter: Life by Orme, vol. I. p. 474.

A consciousness of the unchangeable excellence of truth and goodness inheres in the nature of a moral being, whether upright or perfectly depraved. In strictest consonance with the voice of truth, does the great poet represent the arch-apostate, as retaining this consciousness. There is no unrenewed person who has not been occasionally exercised with the feelings of a natural pensiveness under the chains of his guilt, and with aspirations and longings for a better condition. It is to those principles of our being which are exercised in these natural regrets and aspirings that the gospel applies its powers of persuasion. It makes no direct appeals to our depravity ; it does not inflame our evil passions ; nor has it any tendency to do this ; it addresses those elements of rational and sentient existence which constitute us men ; such as, reason, conscience, the social principle, self-respect, and the desire of happiness or natural self-love,\* making its immediate approaches to these principles of our being, in order, persuasively and lovingly, to overcome the influence of depravity over us ;

\* Not *selfishness*, which is the essence of moral depravity.

or, as the prophet beautifully expresses the idea, drawing us *with cords of a man, with bands of love*.

“God, in his dealings with the souls of men in order to their salvation,” says a theologian, than whom I think a greater cannot be named,\* “doth work very much upon a natural principle of self-love in them. I say, that in order to the saving of souls, God, in his dealing with them, doth very much apply himself to a principle of natural self-love. This is plain, and out of all question. And the precepts with their sanctions (the great instruments that he works and moves them by) do all suppose it. The great gospel precept, ‘believing in the Son of God,’ with its sanction admixt, doth plainly suppose it. *Go preach this gospel to every nation*. What is this for? In order to believing in general. What is the sanction annexed to this precept? *He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned*. These are direct applications to the principle of self-love. What can either of these signify by

\* John Howe: Works, Vol. VIII. pp. 210, 211. Lond. ed. 1822.



way of argument, but as they do accommodate that principle, and are someway suited thereunto? What doth it weigh to tell such a one, You shall be saved, if you believe with a true gospel faith; if he doth not love himself; if he have no love for his own soul? And what doth it weigh to tell such an one, If you do not believe you shall be damned, if he love not his own soul, if he care not what becomes of his soul?—What are heaven and hell laid in open view before us for, in so much amiableness and in so much terror, but to move this principle of self-love?”

Through the abuse of his natural powers and susceptibilities, sin acquired its ascendancy over man; and the gospel, or evangelical persuasion, endeavors through the same medium, to subvert the dominion of sin, and establish that of holiness in its stead. And though it never accomplishes the purpose without a special and supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit, its adaptation to accomplish it is perfect. God, who perfectly knows our nature, both in all its original elements and properties, and in all its degeneracy and perversion, has provided, in the facts and truths of that



gospel which it is the business of preachers to apply to the human mind, a persuasory influence, so admirably suited to recover us to himself, that the wisdom herein displayed is the object of wonder to the angels of heaven.

I shall endeavor, in the following remarks, to give a brief view of that kind of Persuasion which the term *evangelical*, in its appropriate use, defines.

It might be inferred, from statements which are sometimes made on this subject, that no discourse is evangelical which does not contain an outline at least of the gospel system. But I think it can be convincingly shewn, that a discourse embracing, and in some sort defending, every dogma of Christianity, may not be evangelical; and, on the other hand, that one may be eminently so, which makes no explicit mention of a single doctrinal peculiarity of the gospel.

That unquestionably is an evangelical sermon, whatever be its subject, which agrees with the gospel in purpose, spirit, and tendency. An arminian discourse is one, whatever it may have in common with cal-

vinism, which has the spirit and promotes the cause of arminianism. An infidel discourse is one, however replete with truth contained in the gospel, which sustains infidelity. And an evangelical discourse is one—else the adjective in this case does not express the *quality* of the thing designated by the noun—whose drift or design, be its theme what you please, is the same with that for which our Saviour gave his life, for which the Spirit dwells with men, and for which the gospel is preached.

But a discourse may be pervaded by the spirit and subserve the end of a system, without distinctly specifying one of its peculiarities. Systems subversive of one another may yet hold principles in common. Arminianism holds principles in common with calvinism, and all systems agree in some points with Christianity. The simple inculcation of these *common* points is not the inculcation of one *system* more than another; but they may be inculcated in such a manner, and for such an end, as to give the discourse, the *exclusive* character, in a high degree, of some one of the different systems. An arminian,

a calvinist, and an infidel, may each take these common principles, and make discourses from them, marked by the features of their respective systems, as strongly as if their subject-matter had been their points of disagreement and division. Why, then, may not a sermon be eminently evangelical without containing a compend of the gospel, or so much as a formal mention of any of its peculiar doctrines? Does not the spirit of the gospel dwell in every part of the Bible; in the books of Esther and Proverbs, as well as in the Epistles to the Romans and the Hebrews? As the species and quality of a tree may be known from a single branch or leaf, so may a discourse, or a fragment of a discourse, reveal the spirit of the gospel-system, as decisively as the repetition of every doctrine which the system includes.

But more than this may be said. The subject-matter of a discourse may be deeply evangelical, yet not the discourse itself. The discourse and its subject may be at variance in purpose and spirit. It may be the object of the discourse to prove that the sacrifice of Christ was piacular, but not its object or its

tendency to answer the end for which that infinite sacrifice was offered, the actual salvation of men. In spirit or practical influence, it may be adverse to that end. Many a learned and orthodox sermon, in defence of the atonement, of justification by faith, and of regeneration by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, has been opposed to the tendency and design of these great truths as set forth in the Scriptures. The propositions they maintained were sound, but the spirit of the discourses was sectarian or ambitious. They were intellectual, eloquent, triumphant in argument, but not evangelical; not pervaded with the spirit of the gospel, or adapted to promote the design for which the agonies of the garden and the reproaches of the cross were endured by the Saviour of the world. A man may preach, his life long, on the dying love of Christ, and yet not make one evangelical sermon.

Examples may be adduced in illustration of our position. Some preachers, whatever be their subject, are never evangelical; others are eminently so always, though their theme be some point in natural religion or univer-

sal ethics. The sermons of Horsley are, as to their subjects, peculiarly Christian; and as specimens of sound and forcible reasoning, and nervous and elevated writing, and for the most part as impregnable defences of orthodoxy, they will always deserve and command high admiration; but as means of bringing sinners to repentance, or of advancing Christians in spiritual conformity to their self-denying and suffering Lord, they have not, and probably it was not meant they should have, much adaptation: and hence Horsley, gigantic as he is in understanding and learning, is not commonly classed with evangelical preachers. But let a Leighton or a Baxter make a discourse, on the Being or Providence of God, or the most ordinary duty between man and man—points held in common by Christians and deists—and it is so filled with the spirit of the gospel, that every word is alive with that spirit.

The result is, that evangelical preaching, in its generic idea, is the enforcement, not of one specific truth or set of truths, but of moral truth whatever it be, in a certain way, and to a certain end; namely, the way and end of the



gospel. When, therefore, this preaching is defined to be "the preaching of Christ," or, "the preaching of Christ crucified," or, "the preaching of the doctrines of grace," the definition relating, as it does, merely to the subject matter of the preaching in question, would be defective, and adapted to mislead, even if it included, which it does not, whatever may be properly made the theme of this preaching.

It is, however, from the nature of the case certain, and most important to be subjoined, that the grand peculiarities of the gospel system, will, in fact, be preferred before all things else, by the evangelical preacher, as the subjects of his sermons. They are in themselves more directly favorable to the end of his labors; they are more congenial to the evangelical strain and drift of discourse; they are entitled to precedence by their own incomparable excellence and power; and the spirit and frame of his mind will spontaneously incline him to prefer them. Almost as a matter of necessity, the commanding subject, the all-pervading life of his ministry, is the sacrifice of Christ for



the sin of the world: and this likewise is oftener than any other, distinctly introduced and dwelt upon in his sermons.

To be more definite, I would observe, that the preaching of which I speak presents truth to mankind, not abstractedly, but as modified by a living connexion and co-organization with the evangelical system.

Man disconnected at his birth from human society, and immured during life in a dark and solitary cell, is not more different from man improved and refined by daily intercommunion with affectionate and cultivated friends, than truth disjoined and abstracted from other truth, is different from itself as inwrought into a system, and pervaded by the influence of systematic correspondencies and relations. 'Take any truth contained in the gospel out of the sphere of gospel relations and purposes, and it becomes of opposite tendencies to those which it has as a homogeneous part of the evangelical system. It has been justly remarked that the motives of Christianity, like the powers of nature, produce their genuine fruits only in combi-

nation ; whoever severs, perverts them. They are all, says Mr. Coleridge with great accuracy and force, co-organized parts of a great organized whole ; and to detach them from the system to which they are vitally joined, is to destroy their life and purpose. A man who preaches that God is just—that he rewards obedience and punishes sin ; preaches truth contained in the gospel ; but if he adds nothing more, so far from preaching the gospel, he contravenes the purpose which the gospel seeks to accomplish, by intermixing with that truth its own peculiar principles and spirit.—Between the gospel, and one who preaches the doctrine of a gratuitous election, there is so far a concurrence ; but if he fail to subjoin or interweave, a statement of the cognate truths—that Christ died for the human race, that God is not willing that any should perish, that he calls all to repentance, and strives with all by his Word, Spirit and Providence, to embrace his overtures of mercy,—our preacher and the gospel would be direct contraries to each other in the meaning and influence of their respective testimonies on this important sub-

ject.—And there would be no more accordance, as to influence and tendency, between the gospel and one who should set forth Christ crucified and the infinite riches of Divine Grace in every sermon, but be silent as to human perverseness and the necessity for a special influence of the Spirit to overcome it, and the final and aggravated ruin of those who persist in an impenitent life.—Nor again, does that preacher fall in with the design and scope of the gospel, who, with whatever zeal, enforces the practice of holiness, without teaching man's dependence for all holy exercises and actions, on union to Christ and the influence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The subject matter, in short, of evangelical persuasion, is not detached or decomposed truth, but truth, whether peculiar to the gospel or not, modified and tempered by gospel affinities, relations, and uses. In all parts of the gospel system, one assimilating principle, one living and vivifying spirit, dwells; and it is this which makes the gospel, in the language of Paul, *the power of God unto salvation*; a divinely fashioned and appropriate instrument for the recovery of ruined man.

He who, in the strict sense, preaches the gospel, applies in his preaching some part at least of this remedy for human depravity and guilt to the minds of his hearers. He takes, as the matter of his sermon, somewhat from the evangelical mass; and if he uses the portion of it he has taken out well, the texture and quality of the mass and of his sermon will be homogeneous. If he do not directly treat of the atonement, he treats of nothing as disconnected from or unrelated to it. If the atonement be his subject, it is so, as comprising the great facts and principles on which it rests, and those likewise which it consequentially involves. Explicitly or virtually, his theme evermore is the great sacrifice for sin. Evangelical preaching, in a word, is preaching which presents *Christ in every thing, and every thing in Christ.*

The immediate effects of preaching in a good degree evangelical, are often different from what the genuine spirit of the gospel is adapted to produce. The minds of the hearers are thrown into a state of tumultuous feeling: fear is intensely excited; every cor-

ruption of the depraved heart is enlivened and active; evils spring up into life and strength in the breast never known, never dreamt of, as having existence there; and in some instances, the agony of despair is felt. These results must proceed, exclusively or jointly, from unskilfulness on the part of preachers, or misapprehension of the real spirit and scope of the gospel on the part of the persons thus unhappily exercised. If preachers expound and enforce the law of God, as if it had no connexion or affinity with the gospel, or as if its transgressors had to do with nothing but eternal obligation and strict and inexorable justice, they should perhaps ascribe the results of which we speak to their own mismanagement in dispensing the word: or they may be resolvable into the aptitude of depraved and guilty men under the most perfect mode of presenting divine truth, to judge of God's dispositions towards them from their own evil-mindedness towards God. Let the cause be the one or the other, or both in combination, thus much is certain, that it is not to be found in the real genius and influence of the



gospel. If all manner of concupiscence, as in the case personated by the apostle, (Rom. vii,) be wrought in the heart on occasion of the commandments' coming, or of a clear perception and sense of the claims of God's law, let it not be said that this is what should be desired, or what ought to be, or what true evangelical preaching has any tendency to produce. A depraved mind, under a discovery of the true scope and sanctions of the law, might well be thus overpowered by the workings of evil desire, if it regarded nothing but *mere* law and *mere* authority; but with its views thus restricted, it would no more open itself to the just influence of the gospel system, than do the tormented spirits of darkness. The gospel does not, nor should preachers of it, enforce the law of God upon men whom it seeks to save, at any time or under any circumstances, without infusing its own heart-subduing and heart-melting power into the enforcement. Law and gospel are not kept apart from each other in the structure of the evangelical system: they are rather, as it were, chemically blended and infused into each other; gospel dwelling in the law, and



law in the gospel. A voice of terror is raised against all confidence in works of law for salvation, but this is a voice not from the law only, or the gospel only, but from the system and every part of it. It is not the object of the system, *now* to drive men to despair in themselves, and *now* to induce despairing men to hope. Order, as to the time in which these feelings should be produced, is nowhere intimated. All the elements and influences of the system are blended together like the rays which constitute the solar light; and the impression which always, and in every case, it is adapted to make, is a compound one, varying indeed, as to feature, with different minds, occasions, relations and circumstances, but made up of the several ingredients of evangelical holiness. It does not aim to bring men to despair in themselves, without, at the same time and by the same influence, aiming to bring them to trust in Christ. It is never the legitimate effect of the evangelical system, that men are left for one day or one moment in the agony of hopeless conviction; but as the Christian, at each and every moment, should exclude self-reliance, *by* exercising confidence in the

Saviour ; so the gospel calls upon all men to do this, and to do it this moment, the first thing of all ; making no difference in this respect between the Christian and the greatest of transgressors.

Evangelical persuasion, to accomplish its main design, must often direct itself to specific subordinate purposes. Explanations are to be made ; prejudices to be overcome ; objections to be answered ; perverseness to be rebuked ; delusions to be dispelled ; errors to be corrected ; alarms to be raised : but in fulfilling these particular offices, the spirit of the gospel is always the same : one benevolent, recovering, saving intent animates and guides all its addresses : so that, if the human mind be brought into fair contact with its true spirit and tendency in any one point, or at any one moment, the impress it receives is the character of an infant Christian, a newborn child of God. The spirit of infinite love, life, and power, dwells in every part of the gospel, constituting it a fit kind of influence for reaching, recovering, and purifying our entire nature, and raising it to heaven. That, and that only, is evangelical

preaching, which applies this influence to the human mind and heart.

The pulpit has been perverted to all kinds of purposes, and has produced all kinds of effects. For nearly a thousand years its sacred functions were, for the most part, given to topics which deserve no mention. It has been usurped by civil authority to promote state-designs ; and preachers have taken advantage of their high province as ambassadors of Christ, to promote the measures and ends of a political party. It has been pressed into the service of metaphysical refiners and system makers ; and has lent its great energies to the propagation of human science instead of the simple truth as it is in Jesus, and the salvation of men. Thousands by profession preachers of the gospel, have made ethical philosophy the theme of their inculcations ; and the prophets, evangelists, and apostles have been made to give place to Tully, Epictetus, Plato, and other heathen sages. In numberless instances the pulpit has served as the instrument of displaying the wisdom of words, skill, and grace

in the structure of sentences, the elegancies of style, and similar products of human vanity. It has been, and still is, employed by the angry spirit of controversy to excite malignant sectarian zeal. What enormity of evil is involved in these perversions of the pulpit from its legitimate use, is fully known only to that infinite Majesty, who has been hereby insulted and defied. It is to desecrate the Holy of Holies, and quench its sacred light.

This iniquity, it should be remembered, is not difficult to be perpetrated. The sacredness of the pulpit is among those things which are not seen justly, except by the eye of spiritual discernment. To preach evangelically, is an art not to be learned from books, or lectures, or inward meditation. The profound divine, the skilful reasoner, the learned philologist, the bold champion of orthodoxy, the eloquent and powerful persuader, may be a stranger to it. The acquisition of all the treasures of wisdom, knowledge, language, and power, implies necessarily no acquaintance with it. It comes from above; it is imparted by the anointing of the Holy Spi-

rit ; it is exercised only by him whose mouth speaketh from the promptings of a heart in sympathy with His who bore the sins of the world in his own body on the tree.





## NOTE,

*Referred to in the Preface.*

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MR. Coleridge's views on the atonement, are very explicitly given, in his comment on Aphorism XIX, on Spiritual Religion. He there shows, with great ingenuity and force, the absurdity of the scheme which makes the death of Christ the literal payment of a debt ; but he also labors to demonstrate that *it was not a real atonement*. Nothing, he maintains, can be known concerning the redemptive act itself, except from its effects and consequences on ourselves. These effects and consequences, he says, Paul has illustrated, by metaphors drawn from the four following things, as being uppermost in the imaginations of his countrymen. 1. Sin offerings, sacrificial expiation. 2. Reconciliation, atonement. 3. Ransom from slavery, redemption. 4. Satisfaction of a creditor's claims by the payment of a debt. There is, he remarks, the strongest presumptive proof, that

these various periphrases, by which the apostle expresses the same thing, were all used *alike metaphorically*. The real thing thus variously expressed by metaphors, he pronounces, speaking *without any metaphor*, to be REGENERATION,—*the germinal principle of a spiritual life*; thus affirming, in the most express manner, that whenever Paul uses the terms sacrifice for sin, atonement, redemption, etc, in reference to the death of Christ, he intends *regeneration*!—We know, he declares, concerning the redemptive act itself, the facts, that “the eternal Word was made flesh, fulfilled all righteousness, and so suffered and died for us, as in dying, to conquer death, for as many as should receive him. More than this, the mode, the possibility, we are not competent to know.” That he conquered death, then, for as many as should receive him, by making a real atonement for their sins, or that he honored God’s violated law by enduring what was equivalent to its penalty, and so satisfying Divine Justice, is a doctrine which Mr. Coleridge professedly reasons against, in this elaborate comment. He admits of no other than a metaphorical atonement under the Christian dispensation. The atonement, the recon-

ciliation, intended by Paul, speaking *without any metaphor*, was *regeneration* !

Mr. Coleridge regards Christ's work—the *redemptive act itself*—as having no influence of which we can have knowledge, except on *the redeemed* : but has the church been in a mistake in supposing that the sacred writers, and especially Paul, have explicitly affirmed, that it has an influence Heavenward, as well as upon man ; that it sustains the Divine government in perfect majesty and strength, while mercy is shown to transgressors of the Divine law, or preserves Justice inviolate and co-regent with Grace, while penitent believers are justified ; and that it does this by revealing the Divine wrath against sin, as perfectly as it would have been done, by the full punishment of the redeemed ? Let us take heed lest the foundations be destroyed.

THE END.











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taken from the Building**

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